Kentucky Mountain Fantasies

Percy MacKaye

KENTUCKY MOUNTAIN
FANTASIES

WORKS ON AMERICAN FOLK-THEMES

by Percy MacKaye

ON THE KENTUCKY MOUNTAINS

Untamed America (*Survey-Graphic,* Jan., 1924)
This Fine-Pretty World, A Comedy, in Three Acts
Tall Tales of the Kentucky Mountains
The Gobbler of God, a Poem of the Appalachians
Kentucky Mountain Fantasies—Three Short Plays:
- Napoleon Crossing the Rockies
- The Funeralizing of Crickneck
- Timber: in Two Parts

ON NEW ENGLAND

[*Narrative Poems*]

Ticonderoga
Fight: An Epic of Plattsburg
Dogtown Common
The Skippers of Nancy Gloucester

[*Plays*]

The Scarecrow, A Tragedy of the Ludicrous
Yankee Fantasies: Five Short Plays
- Chuck
- Gettysburg
- The Antick
- The Catboat
- Sam Average

ON NATIONAL LIFE

Washington, The Man Who Made Us: A Ballad Play
Saint Louis, A Masque of American Civilization
Epoch: A Background of Cultural History



THE TIMELESS VALLEYS

KENTUCKY MOUNTAIN FANTASIES

Three Short Plays
For an Appalachian Theatre

BY

PERCY MACKAYE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

ARVIA MACKAYE



SAMUEL FRENCH
NEW YORK LOS ANGELES
SAMUEL FRENCH (CANADA) LTD. TORONTO
SAMUEL FRENCH LTD. LONDON
1933

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MADE IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To my son

KEITH MACKAYE

IN REMEMBRANCE OF OUR COMRADESHIP
IN THE MOUNTAINS

PREFACE

One of the most poignant moments of human history is now passing in the heart of our America. Within the next decade, or less, the remote regions of the southern Appalachian Mountains, which for nearly two centuries have sequestrated and nurtured there the ancient civilization of our blended Celtic and Anglo-Saxon breeds, will render over the last of their folk heritage to the inroads of inexorable modernity.

In this epical moment two worlds of the spirit are already meeting in a starkness of contrast unprecedented within the bounds of one age and nation—a contrast wherein, at one flash, the man before Copernicus confronts the man of radium and wireless, and the world of Isaiah stands confounded by the world of Marconi.

In this psychic encounter both tragedy and comedy are immanent. As a dramatist I felt its lure, and by it I was led in 1921 to an opportunity for personal experience and observation in a richly characteristic region of the Kentucky mountains. Climbing the sharp ridges of the divide, on foot and mule-back, I passed beyond railroads out of the dominions of to-

day to sojourn in the timeless valleys of the Old Testament. There I dwelt and explored in close friendly touch with the native people, feeling strangely at one with my own highland kindred of a sundered clime and era. To express some intimations of the mountain life and lore, language and human character in forms of literature became for me a quickening incentive there, and has remained so here in this contrasted world since my return.

Long before, in 1903, I had written the first of a group of five one-act plays concerning northern phases of Appalachian folk-life, in New England, later collected and issued, in 1912, under the title of *Yankee Fantasies,* the first published group of American folk-plays. So it was in resumption of that earlier incentive that I set about writing a group of plays, tales and poems, dealing with southern mountain themes.

Of the plays, a three-act comedy, *This Fine-Pretty World,* completed in 1922, was submitted to producers in New York during October of that year. Over a year later it was produced by The Neighborhood Playhouse, New York, December 26, 1923, being published at that time. Meanwhile I had written a brief account of my mountain sojourn, entitled *Untamed America* (published in the *"Survey-Graphic,"* January, 1924), and the three short plays included in this volume.

Of these, *Napoleon Crossing the Rockies,* begun in

the mountains, in 1921, was published in "The Century Magazine," April, 1924, and was first produced by Thomas Wood Stevens, at the Carnegie Institute Theatre, Pittsburgh, May 21, 1924; *Crickneck* and *Timber* have remained till now in manuscript, unproduced, and are here published for the first time.

It is thus nearly seven years since my first trip into the mountains of Kentucky. During that period, more than a year after the completion of *This Fine-Pretty World* and the three plays here collected, the first Broadway plays on mountain themes began to appear in New York toward the end of 1923, since when such themes have become fairly familiarized to the playgoing public. Yet the creative mines of that human mountain world, in all their variety of imaginative product, have hardly as yet been explored. Particularly in respect to influences of clime and tradition, a marked distinction is to be made between the more vigorous types of the Kentucky ridge-folk and the native Appalachians of the regions stretching from there to the far south. My own experience and work are concerned with those of Kentucky.

To create for their rich illiteracy and lore a nucleus of literature, wrought of their native speech, was a task which enticed me in beginning the group of mountain works already referred to. But that alluring task was almost wholly interrupted by my decision —in February, 1923,—to undertake the biography of

my father *: a long-meditated labor which I then planned to set aside a year to accomplish. To complete that memoir, in two large volumes, however, required four years and a half of incessant work, with the exception of ten weeks in the summer of 1924, when I returned briefly to my mountain themes, writing *Tall Tales of the Kentucky Mountains* (published in "The Century Magazine," 1924; as a book, 1926) and *The Gobbler of God,* a narrative poem (published in book form, 1928).

As the volumes of my projected mountain group, which have thus far appeared, have received a gracious welcome from the public and from reviewers who have asked for more, this much of record in retrospect is pertinent to the present time, when I find myself once more happily engaged in seeking to round out the group by further volumes to follow.

PERCY MACKAYE.

The Players, New York,
January, 1928.

* *EPOCH, The Life of Steele MacKaye, Genius of the Theatre, in Relation to his Times and Contemporaries,* in 2 Volumes, with 396 Illustrations, Charts of Plays and Inventions, Bibliography, etc., New York, Boni & Liveright, 1927.

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NAPOLEON
CROSSING THE ROCKIES



PERSONS

LARK FIDDLER
TILDY, *his wife*
HODGE, *a kind of business man*
STEPTOE, *another kind*

SCENE

Lark's Cabin, in the Kentucky mountains, at the present time

NAPOLEON CROSSING THE ROCKIES

Interior of a log cabin in the mountains. Twilight. Through the open door (at back, right) a glimpse of gray palings and dim forest beyond.
From a dark corner of the cabin (left) rises a stifled moaning.
Then all is very still again.
After a little, voices are heard outside, a wooden gate creaks, and the dim shape of a man appears in the doorway.
He knocks. No answer.
He knocks again, peering in.

THE MAN

Anybody home?

[*The moaning recurs, very faintly. The man calls, louder.*]

Heigh, Uncle Lark! Aunt Tildy!

[*Again no answer.*

In the dorway appears another man, who speaks in disgruntled tones.]

THE OTHER MAN

Nobody home, eh? Nineteen Kentucky miles up this

damn trail, and now nobody! Look at the mud! Up to my knees, by gumption!

THE FIRST MAN

Don't get so grouchy, Hodge. The old couple can't be gone far. They're sure to step in soon and hand out the best they've got.

HODGE

They sure will, if they swallow my bait. This makes the third trip I've tramped these God-forsook creeks, fishin' for suckers. I'm dead sick of it. Our deal has got to be settled to-night, Steptoe. I won't lug this back home again. Heft it.

[*He hands him a cloth bag.*]

STEPTOE

[*Jingling it heavily*]

The bait, heigh?

HODGE

That's the stuff to land these mountain suckers.

STEPTOE

[*Handing back the bag*]

Maybe you're right. I've wintered and summered these creeks—in the religious line. I've tackled these mountain fish before now, but maybe you can handle them better than me in regular business.

HODGE

Why shouldn't I? Don't I hand 'em their pay-envelopes, every Saturday night, down yonder?

STEPTOE

Sure, down creek there, in the mills and mines, after we've got 'em dollar-signed, like the rest of us. But that's not up creek in their own timber, back beyond the railroads, like here.

HODGE

Talk that to their tombstones! This here ain't going to stay beyond the railroad; not for much! [*Jingling his bag.*] And here's what makes the mare go, I guess.

STEPTOE

Well, you try your guess. Maybe it works. But if yours misses, I'll try my own. My kit's not so hefty as yours.

[*He takes from his pocket two little parcels, wrapped in pink and blue paper.*]

HODGE

What you got there?

STEPTOE

[*Putting the parcels away again*]

Oh, never mind. Only if I win *my* toss, we'll go fifty-fifty when we stick the company three hundred per cent, on the turn-over. How about it?

HODGE

Suits me. The company can stand a little agent's fee, I reckon. This piece o' property will mint 'em a tidy sum.

STEPTOE

How much, about?

HODGE

Well, coal, timber, and water control—half a million, easy; maybe a million. You see, this cabin lays right in the notch of the gap, and the old couple here own both shanks of the water-shed straight up to the ridge-tops.

STEPTOE

[*Ruminatingly, takes up a dark object from a shelf, and feels it over*]

Maybe a million! As you were saying, it's a mite muddy, this sport.

HODGE

What sport?

STEPTOE

Fishing for suckers.

[*The dark object emits a faint twang.*]

HODGE

What's there, a fiddle?

STEPTOE

Yes. It's his—old Uncle Lark's. He's fiddled it through twenty counties, back in the timber—punch-

eon reels and ballad matches, and himself "allers the champeen," as he'll tell you. [*Putting back the fiddle on the shelf.*] Maybe a million, you said?

HODGE

Yep, I reckon so. [*He turns and listens.*] What's that bell tinkling—a cow?

STEPTOE

It sure is. And that ought to mean the old man behind her. He'll hunt that cow in the timber five miles for half a pint.

HODGE

Say, he's aiming to drive *some* milk business!

STEPTOE

Yes, Hodge; and if we're aiming to drive some *other* business, I advise we don't stand waiting on the doorstep. We'll drop in a bit later—what?

HODGE

Suits me. Listen to that creek roaring! How's that for water-power?

STEPTOE

Maybe a million!

[*Their figures disappear outside.*

The cow-bell tinkles.

In the cabin once more a faint moaning rises from the left, where a dim object shoves slowly upward from the floor and flops down again.

Meanwhile the tinkle-tankle of the bell sounds less far, and through it a man's voice, cracked in a melodi-

ous pitch, sings with blithe dolefulness out of the falling twilight]:

"His voice is the sound of the dulcimore sweet,
Is heard in the vale of the tomb;
But, oh, the fair vow on his lips is as fleet
As the early fragrance of the bloom."

[*While the song dies into silence, the dim object stirs and groans incoherent words.*
Soon the man's voice is heard in a long, high, lilting call: Oh—wee—ee!
At this, the dim object answers huskily: Oh—wee—ee!
And now the man's voice sings, close by, to a rough, staccato rhythm, gaily]:

"I had an old blue cow, and her name were Luck.
Ary time I mulked her, she run over the cup.
I fed her on coren, oats, and hay,
And mulked her twenty-five times a day."

[*In the middle of his song, old* LARK *himself looms in the doorway, a hatless, dishevelled, shambling, mountainy figure, with a cow-bell, swung by a string round his neck, jangling under his unshorn chin. In one hand he swings a big tin pail.*
Standing a moment, he peers into the cabin and calls:]

LARK

Tildy, ole woman! [*He enters, singing again*]:

"Yander comes the bell-cow!
Ketch her by the tail!

When ye go to mulk her
Fotch your bushel-pail."

[*Setting his pail on a table, he holds both fists over it, milking the air with his fingers as he looks out of doors and calls again:*]

Tildy! Oh—wee—ee!

TILDY

[*The dim object on the floor answers him feebly*]
Oh—wee—ee!

LARK

Eh? Whar be ye?

TILDY

Holp me up, Lark. I heerd ye sang-callin'.

LARK

Lor salvation ye, ole feller! Is hit you flufflin' here in the dark, like a dawzzled pa'tidge-bird? [*He bends over her, perturbed, speaking louder*:] What winged ye?

TILDY

Holp me raise, cain't ye? [*He lifts her to a sitting posture, where she breathes hard.*] I fell over, jist.

LARK

You shore fell a clar whistle. Pyore ole Tildy! How come hit ye tottered?

TILDY

I jist tuck arter the white hen had drapped her egg in the pipkin, and she whopped her out so quick, skritchin'

and cacklin' of hit, till I were that shackled I creened over and plumb changed the ends of me.

LARK

How long time sence ago?

TILDY

Long enough for to reel a broach and weave hit.

LARK

And nobody come by to holp ye?

TILDY

I heerd two fellers bumblin' togither—couldn't hear what-all they was sayin'—jist only some gab about water-milyons and fishin' the cricks.

LARK

Fishin', was they?

TILDY

Yis; sounded like they was brought-on strangers. So I shet me quiet, and let them go on their ways agin.

LARK

[*His head shaking with solemnity*]

And you jist layin' here lonesome, and never raisin' ye!

TILDY

How would I raise me, and both my arm-bones busted sence New Christmas I tottered the last time? [*Pushing back her sleeves.*] Look at 'em—crookled and nubby the likes of two ole split-brooms!

LARK

Pyore ole feller! And did hit punish your legs, this tumble?

TILDY

My legs? Ah, dear Suz! Ain't I allers spilin' my life away, limpitty-laggin' hit here in the cabin-smoke,—and you hitself climbin' the hills in your slickery hip-jints, mulkin' of fine-pretty Molly in the penny-royal!

[*Solemnly unnoosing his neck from the dangling cow-bell,* LARK *squats down beside* TILDY, *and tinkles the bell toward her, with deep earnestness.*]

LARK

Listen at this-here, woman! Molly herself mought be snuffin' the fragrance of the pennyroyal, but hit's me hitself is been tromplin' the dreens and mires to the notch of my breeches, and brung us home jist only this-yere bell-neckliss, which hit's fine-pretty Molly has on-clad of her brindly bosom, climbin' naked the hills.

[*Tossing aside the bell with a sweeping gesture of disgust, he inverts the tin pail and sits on it.*]

TILDY

[*Gasping, starts to reach for the pail*]

The milk! Mol's milk! Ye're plumb spillin' hit, Lark!

LARK

[*Gazing at her, reproachfully*]

You're plumb spillin' the milk of human kindness,

Tildy. The milk of Mol is yit onprofaned on the mount'ins.—Let that hit sour in her dugs, I says, ef be hit's for sakes of *her* you and me is to set here now, sassin' our faces at the day-dyin.'

TILDY

Who's sassin' faces? And who's aimin' to be settin' here on the floor, when I's ruint to be raised up yander in my hickery and set sufferin', all my lon'st, on our weddin'-birthday.

LARK

[*Starting*]

Weddin'! Our weddin'-birthday! God bless your soul and body, tell me that over ag'in, Tildy! Were hit plumb this same day and time, pime-blank of the year, what I first unwiddered ye in wedlock?

TILDY

Yis, ole man: May hit were, come full moon, twenty year and gone, this self-same night.

LARK

[*Staring*]

This-yere night!

TILDY

[*Pointing at the bed*]

Yander lays the weddin' kivver. I hand-warped hit myself on the loom; but hit missed out on the len'th. My fust man he were more stubbier in the shanks. Hit has allers scanted ye at the feet-ends, yan kivver.

LARK

Hit has, in specially winter-times.

TILDY

The blades of your both big toes skirlin' out like two reap-hooks, skeerin' the rats: oftly I've seed 'em stickin' up thar, shaddered agin the dayrise, and you a-snorin' the piller, your chin drapped, gapin' the grey flies.

LARK

Tildy! You remembrancin' me so kind-heartly that-a-way, and me clare fergittin' ye on the eve of our anniversity!

TILDY

Yea, worserer yit, man: Gittin' toyous you was, tinklin' yan bell to me about Molly climbin' naked the hills.

LARK

[*Rising*]

A-r-r-r, drattle her, Molly! Hit's no four-leggy shemale kin cut-in betwix us'ns. [*He bends over her, with gaunt chivalry.*] Retch up your eyes, ole woman, and grabble them at mine, which they's retchin' ye back the truth that's everlastin'. I'll swing to ye, Tildy! I'll swing to ye till the jedgment-horn and the grave-houses crackles open to the blast of hit. So raise up, ole feller, and swing to your partner! [*With awkward tenderness he lifts her to her feet.*]

TILDY

[*Groaning*]

Slow! Slow! Eh, Lor'! My j'ints punishes me.

LARK

[*Assisting her*]

That's standin' smart. Now circalate ye a leetle grain.

TILDY

I ain't good-able to go.

LARK

Try steppin' out easy.

TILDY

I cain't.

LARK

Shore, try, Tildy.

TILDY

I cain't, never nothin' in the world.

LARK

Jist imagine ye kin. What-all the sperrit kin imagine, the will o' man kin conquer hit. That's what ole Bonaparte he says to hisself—ole Napoleon, when he were crossin' the Rockies. Hit were a terriblest trail, but he clumb and trompled hit to victory. Now, then, ole woman, let we'ns example him. Yander hickery cheer hit'll be the first ridge o' the climb, and you kin rest ye thar. Grab hard o' me. Look good, now!

TILDY

[*Painfully limping a step or two*]

Keep a-holtin' me, Lark.

LARK

Hit's a longsome, rocky trail to the peaks of conquerin'; but songs is the steppy-stones, and I'll sustain ye up with 'em, Tildy.

[*Assisting her very slowly toward the hickory chair,* LARK *sings aloud, as she clutches his arm, limping*:]

"My lovin' wife, my bosom friend,
The object of my love,
The time's ben sweet with us on airth,
My sweet, onharmless dove.

The time will come we'll not be here,
We'll be some ither-where:
Into a world unknowed to us
We'll shorely disappear."

[*Placing her in the chair.*] Thar, Tildy! Rest ye.

TILDY

Why-fur would I want to rest me in a world unknowed, and us disappearin' thar?

LARK

[*In surprise*]

Hit's a good, God-fearin' song.

TILDY

Hit likes me bad to hear hit. I'd ruther as have some

catnip tea or a dish of pokeberry biled. A hot sup would pacify me off.

LARK

[*Responding with alacrity*]

Shore hit will. I'll het ye the pot in a minute.

[*He goes to the fireplace, stirs up some coals with fresh sticks, dippers some water into an iron pipkin, and shoves it amid the fire. Then reaching with shaky hands to a shelf, he rummages forth some dried roots. Meanwhile he whistles the tune he has been singing, and talks to* TILDY.]

Lucky I fotched water from the spring afore I went milk-huntin'. But I 'low we's short-rationed on catnip; pokeberry, too, I reckon. [*Rummaging.*] Yea, ole feller; here ain't nothin' but rattle-weed: squaw-weed, they calls the she-male gineration. Hit's prime for women has gallstones and rheumatics. Will I bile ye some for your j'ints?

TILDY

Yis, I knows hit right smart—quaw-weed. I's digged me many's the bushel, sang-huntin' on the mount'ins. Lor', yis! When I were chunk of a heifer, back away-y-y yander in war-time, Maw and me us lived on hit 'most a month, and the ribels man-huntin' paw layin'-out in Cumberland Gap. Yis, yis; bile me some quaw-weed.

LARK

[*Putting some roots in the pot*]

Them roots'll soon warm ye somethin' liquory for to

cilibration our wedlock. What more now kin I get ye, old wifey, for to be antic this night?

TILDY

Shore, you needsn't be axin me that. Ye know hit at the stand-in.

LARK

Know what?

TILDY

What I's ben eetchin' my heart fer, and you promisin' hit you'd surprise me with.

LARK

What, Tildy? Jist whack my mind a jolt.

TILDY

Oh, Lark, don't be brashin' me! Hain't you brung hit?

LARK

Brung what-all?

TILDY

The purty bead-chain, the pieded beads for to string rounct my neck. [LARK *looks at her in dumb dejection. She cries out, with a pang in her voice.*] Ah, then, you clar fergitted me, did ye? You jist only remimbered yan Mol and her cow-bell neckliss!

LARK

Tildy, Tildy, Lord love ye! I hain't ben to fergit ye; but where-all could I go beggin' at, fer to find ye

them beads? The store is clean shet of 'em. The world is voided of 'em.

TILDY

[*Grimly stoical*]

Quit your gash.

LARK

Hit divvils me to disappint ye, ole mare. I's hunted the high peaks and the low gaps for them pieded beads, and nary a purty neckliss could I find ye yit for a giftsake. But I promises ye, Tildy—

TILDY

Quit your gash, I says. I's trifled to death with your promises. They has me thawed like ole snow.

LARK

Poor busted feller! No wonder of hit! But wait, jist: I'll fotch ye Singin' Susie now. She'll reel ye the music of the old philosophers, what'll skein up the ravelments of your sorrer.

TILDY

O Lor'! Yan fiddle!

LARK

[*Goes to a'shelf and takes down the fiddle*]

Ole Napoleon he were the up-heartedest musicianer of man's sperrit. Made him a march tune, he did, in the peaks of the mount'ins. That-thar tune hit'll retch

to etarnity. Weren't I tellin' ye about hit—him a-crossin' the Rockies—weren't I?

TILDY

[*Feebly*]

Yis; you ben tellin' of hit sence afore Adam died.

LARK

[*Unhearing*]

Ole Napoleon—away-y-y up yander on the ridges of the world: lonesome he were, thar. Well, sir, hit were mid-warp o' the night, and lonesome he war settin' his nag thar, still; still like the pole star; still like he were quarried outen a clift; crossin' of his arms, this-a-way, creenin' of his forehead down; scroogin' of his jaws togither. His hat were sewed up in three squares, black as the dark.

Never spoke a word, he didn't. His nag never budged. Lonesome in the middist of thousands. For his conquerin' army kep' a-comin', passin' of him by, buildin' the trail as they went. On up, on up, on up, crossin' of the Rockies; thousands, thousands. Seven days and nights, on up, crossin' of the Rockies.

And Napoleon—ole Bonaparte—jist sot thar; never turned his head to nobody. Seven nights and days never cracked a word to nobody.

But arter the seventh night, yerly in the dayrise, all of a suddent he moved thar. The smoke o' dawn hit were jist scarletin' red, and ole Napoleon he moved. High uply he stood in his sterrups, his both arms retchet yander to the mornin' star, and he made him

a song, a march-ditty; and he sung hit thar out aloud, atops o' the mount'ins, up, up, to the bright and mornin' star: *"Napoleon Crossin' the Rockies!"*

TILDY

[*Fidgeting*]

Yea, yea! Is the fire-pot bilin' yit?

LARK

[*Unhearing*]

That were the name he give to the ditty. The words of hit is lost forever; but they's poeters will tell ye—and I'll never misdoubt them—how the mornin' star she kin still remimber them words, and she hitself is the only livin' soul in Creation what sings them yit, and her a-settin' over the Rockies in the bloomin' of light.—But the *tune* of yan song is ben handed down the ages of time; and me, Lark Fiddler, I's larned hit to Singin' Susie, and me and Susie will play hit to ye now. Ring on, ole Susan! [*Eagerly lifting his fiddle to his chin, he starts to play, but stops, with a faint groaning.*] Oh, Godamighty! them strings!

TILDY

Yis, ole man. Godamighty He give ye a fergittery in. the place of a mimory.

LARK

[*Lowering his fiddle, gazes on it, grief-stricken*]

Two of them is busted, Tildy, the coarse and the mid-

dle. I plumb forgot hit. I've got to send clare to Harlan Town for to git me some new strings.

TILDY

[*Tartly*]

You'll never send for a string o' *beads,* I'm guessin'.

LARK

Ye see, Tildy, hit's three-chorded a ditty, *"Napoleon,"* and hit's got to go in passels, coarse and fine. A fiddle has four strings to her: low, coarse, middle, and fine; but here's two of Singin' Susie is busted. I cain't play *"the Rockies"* on jist low and fine. I needs more chords in the fold o' my playin'.

TILDY

Then I's be spared to peace and quiet *this* weddiversity!

LARK

[*In utter dejection*]

A-yah! And I could of tuned your sperrit to the crack of conquerin', jist only hadn't them two strings abusted.

TILDY

My two arm-bones is busted. That's terribler than fiddle-strings.

LARK

By Gub! And sech a misery for to behappen us *this* one night on the airth!

TILDY

We's bit by the tooth of carkin' sorrer, Lark. I's be dyin' my death soon.

LARK

Yea, Tildy, God's toppled us down over. We's wadin' in the pitsome darkness of Apollyon.

[*A sharp rap sounds on the door-jamb, and a shadowy* FIGURE *peers in calling.*]

THE FIGURE

Who's to home?

LARK

[*Starting up*]

Jedgment! What's comin' next?

TILDY

[*Timorously*]

Shet the door!

[HODGE *enters with* STEPTOE.]

HODGE

Is this here Lark Fiddler's cabin?

STEPTOE

[*Coming forward*]

Howdy, Uncle Lark! Good evening to you, Aunt Tildy. How you getting along?

TILDY

[*With feeble surprise*]

Lark! ef hit 'tain't Mr. Steptoe, the nice prayer-meetin' feller you met to the Forks.—Were hit you, sir, come by afore, this day evenin', fishin' the crick?

LARK

Feller alive! is hit you? [*Warmly shaking his hand.*] Come in, come in; set ye. Git ye a cheer.

STEPTOE

Uncle, shake hands with my good friend, Mr. Hodge, of the United Mine and Lumber Company.

LARK

Proud am I to meet up with ye, Mr. Hog. Hail from down the Blue Grass, do ye?

HODGE

Well, not so far; but down in that direction.

LARK

Over yan side! Well, sir, I allers did crave to git thar; but hit's moughty a world off from here'n, and me oldin' in the legs. Out foot-loose on travel-pleasure, air ye?

HODGE

Nope; out on business.

STEPTOE

He's walked 'most all the way here since sun-up,

Uncle, just to see you and Aunt Tildy. His mule took lame near the start, and he got me to guide him to you.

LARK

Do ye hear the glad tidin's, Till? They's come to take a night with us.

TILDY

Yis, yis, and welcome. I'll set me here in the hickery. The bed's good wide for three.

STEPTOE

No, no, my kind friends. You're too hospitable indeed! We've found lodging already down at the store. We just dropped in for a few minutes. Mr. Hodge won't keep you long. He's on business. It's that little timber transaction I told you about.

TILDY

[*Leaning forward*]

What's he sayin'? Transaction?

STEPTOE

Perhaps—if there might be a little more light—

TILDY

[*To* LARK]

Kindle the wick, man. Git the poke-stick and stir a blaze.

LARK

[*Bustling to do so*]

Yea, sir-r-r-s! Right smart away. Holp yourself to some cheers, gintlemen. [*Setting a chimneyless lamp on the table.*] Yere she is, the lamp. Hev you ary a strike-match about ye, Mr. Hog?

HODGE

[*Handing him a match*]

Hodge is my name, sir!

LARK

[*Lighting the charred lamp-wick, which smokes duskily*]

She smudges that-a-way, gin hit's drafty.

TILDY

Shove hit to—the door.

LARK

[*Shutting the door, and referring to the lamp*]

But wait a leetle, jist! She'll shine up glorious, when she gits her bearin's. [*Going now to the hearth, he pokes the fire, which throws a flickering, cheerful light into the room.*] Hit's bilin', Tildy,—the quaw-weed! I'll bring ye the tea in two minutes. Hit'll hunt the punishment outen your j'ints, poor ole feller!

STEPTOE

Are you feeling ill, Auntie?

LARK

Yea, she tottered. She fell, and hurted her, poor Tildy; but she were busted afore that.

STEPTOE

[*Bending over her, solicitous*]

Why, dear me, that's terrible. I'm so sorry, so awfully sorry! Can't I do something for you?

TILDY

Yis, shore; you kin holp him steep the tea.

STEPTOE

I'll be overjoyed to. [*Joining* LARK] Here, Uncle, don't trouble. I'll attend to the pot. Just talk to Mr. Hodge, and I'll be nurse to Aunt Tildy.

[STEPTOE *takes* LARK'S *place at the fire, and pays assiduous little attentions to* TILDY *in pantomime.* LARK *rises from his squatting position.*]

LARK

Proud are we to thank ye, friend Steptoe, and you that neighborsome. [*Plunging a gourd dipper into the water-pail.*] Kin I offer ye a gourd of clare spring water, Mr. Hog, after you sweatin' hit up-creek so fur?

HODGE

No, thanks. And my name—

LARK

Hit's purely crystal—yes, sir-r! Th' ain't anither

spring in nine counties kin outprize yander spring of ourn. Heigh, Tildy? [*He drinks from the gourd.*]

TILDY

Nay; shorely. Hit'll sample the same waters what Moses cracked from the Bible rock.

LARK

And that's a fact verity. I keeps hit hollered out clean in a clare, round sand-bowl the bigness of a bushel. Star-glisty hit is, yan water-spring. Purtiest sight, o' summers, hit shines thar in the tall timber, shadder-blue and gold-rosy, like ole Pharaoh had lostid his jewel-crown. Jist only May-apple and spignut scamps the green brink of hit. *Drip-drap, drip-drap,* hit keeps mulkin' hitself from the dugs of the mount'in; and all the whiles, right over hit, a gray-leetle mournin'-dove is flute-flutin' from the bosom of a layin-tree.

HODGE

More'n likely, sir. But let's get to business. I ain't come here to talk spring-water. Sit down.

LARK

[*Bewilderedly, sitting with* HODGE *at the table*]

Thank ye. Set yourself easy, sir.

HODGE

I will. And now, take it from me—I'm a business man, a straight-from-the-shoulder, up-and-comin' busi-

ness man. I don't beat about no bushes—nor spring-water landscapes.

LARK

[*Murmurs, absently*]

Dad-burned purty—that spring!

HODGE

So, see here! I bring you a straight proposition. Are you ready for it?

LARK

[*Staring*]

Ready for hit?

HODGE

Yes. Man to man, shall I shoot?

LARK

[*Floundering to his feet, calls out excitedly*]

Friend Steptoe, ef this here feller is aimin' to gun-shoot, you tell him I'm a fiddler. I don't stick my hands up for no feud-handlers nor night-gangsters: jist only for to saw my fiddle, thar.

STEPTOE

Bless your heart, Uncle, don't be alarmed. You misunderstood him, my good friend Hodge. He's a fine Christian man. He talks a queer down-creek lingo, that's all. I feel certain he begs pardon for confusing you .

HODGE

[*Responding to a meaningful look from* STEPTOE]
Sure; beg pardon.

STEPTOE

I feel certain he's just as fond of fiddling as you and I are.

HODGE

[*Pursing his mouth*]

Sure.

STEPTOE

[*Calming* TILDY]

It's all right, Auntie.

LARK

Partial to fiddlin', air ye? I axes *your* pardin, Mr. Hog. Have you ever follered *"Crossin' the Rockies"?*

HODGE

Crossin' *which?*

LARK

[*Picking up his fiddle*]

Ole Bonaparte—Napoleon, ye rickollect—he imposed hit crossin' the peaks. Hit's a fond tune for shorin' the soul up, tol'able fast, but 'tain't of the fastest merits; cause, ye rickollect, he war feelin' lonesome then. Yit, however, they was thousands thar, marchin'.—On up, on up, on up, crossin' of the Rockies.

[*Glancing at* STEPTOE, HODGE *taps his own forehead, questioning.* STEPTOE *laughs furtively.*]

HODGE

Very good, but—

LARK

Seven nights and days, jest settin' his nag-saddle. Then up he riz and hollered hit to the bright and mornin' star. [*He draws a long, high note on his fiddle.*] Thot-thar's the drill note. I can give ye that one, but the balanct is busted, two strings of her, coarse and middle—eh, Godamassy! [*He sits down, lugubrious.*]

HODGE

Then supposing we get down to my proposition. Listen. I represent the U. M. A. L. C. Do you get that?

LARK

[*Glancing up solemnly*]

A L C—? I don't foller larnin', Mr. Hog.

HODGE

[*Testily*]

Say, Steptoe, will you please to inform Uncle Napoleon that I'm *Hodge;* I ain't *Hog!*

STEPTOE

[*Pouring from the steaming pot into a cup, replies mischievously*]

Why bother about synonyms? Now, Aunt Tildy, here's your tea.

TILDY

[*Sipping it as he waits on her*]

Quaw-weed hets me fine.

HODGE

[*Grimacing, turns to* LARK]

The United Mine and Lumber Company, Incorporated —that's my firm, sir. Now my firm is building a railroad into this section to operate business. We control the right of way up this creek, straight through this cabin.

LARK

[*Hazily*]

This-yere cabin?

HODGE

Yes, sir. And being directly in our way, we're naturally planning to tear down this building and fell the timber on both sides, to the legal width of the eminent domain.

TILDY

[*With feeble shrillness*]

Tear hit down—my cabin—the timber—

STEPTOE

Hush, Auntie! Listen! [*He whispers at her ear. She listens restively.*]

LARK

[*Swallowing hard*]

Em-i-nent dó-main—

HODGE

Absolutely. So, you see, accordin' to law, you ain't got nothin' to say about it.

LARK

[*Slowly*]

'Cordin' to law—nothin' to say—

HODGE

Absolutely nothing. Only, of course,—that being quite understood,—all the same, we're aiming to treat you right.

LARK

You're aimin'—

HODGE

Fair and square. I understand you own the land, both flanks of this gap, as high as the ridges. Is that so?

LARK

The old guv'ner—she owns hit.

TILDY

[*Quickly*]

Yis; I owns hit.

HODGE

Her? But you're legally married?

TILDY

Yis; this-yere night.

HODGE

[*Whistling*]

To-night!

LARK

Twenty year ago sence.

HODGE

Oh! Very good. Then you're party to it, as her husband. So, mind, I'm talkin' to both of you, man and wife. Now here's my proposition.

LARK

Whar?

HODGE

[*Lifting his bag from under the table*]

Here.

STEPTOE

You see, Uncle and Auntie, he hasn't forgot your anniversary.

LARK

Tildy! What's he bringin' us?

HODGE

Look!

[*Untying the bag, he inverts it, slowly pouring out upon the table, near the lamp-flame, a heap of shining coins.*

LARK *and* TILDY *stare for a moment, dumfounded.*]

TILDY

[*After a pause*]

Lark, is hit glory from the timple of Solomon?

HODGE

Reach your fingers. Handle it over. [*While* LARK *reaches tentatively,* HODGE *thrusts his own hands amid the pile and scatters the coins about.*] Try that with your eye-tooth! Is it lead or silver?

LARK

[*Biting a large coin*]

Hit's a cartwheel.

HODGE

Lick that with your tongue! Is it copper or gold?

LARK

[*Tasting a small coin*]

Hit 'tain't puckerish.

HODGE

No, sir, it's a gold eagle—solid gold. There you are, old folks—a fortune for the days of your life: three hundred dollars in real Uncle Sam metal!

TILDY

Is that-thar—for us'ns?

HODGE

Yes, ma'am, it is. [*Taking from his pocket a docu-*

ment, he unfolds it on the table.] Just stick your two marks on this paper, duly witnessed, and the whole pile is yours. [*He unscrews a fountain-pen, and holds it out toward* TILDY.]

TILDY

What is hit—yan paper?

HODGE

It's a bill of sale for your cabin and land here. We've looked up your title down to the county seat. It's O. K. You just sign.

TILDY

What fur?

HODGE

To convey your property to our company, in advance of our building the railroad.

TILDY

I never seed one. I never want for to see ary.

STEPTOE

Oh, but why, Aunt Tildy? The railroad is wonderful. The railroad—

TILDY

Yis; I's heern about her. I's heern how she belches smoke, and spittles fire-ashes, and tracks dirt terrible in the world. She'd spile the spring. Lark kin tell ye about her.

LARK

I shore kin. I rid the ole witch-wagon down to Pineville onct. Bellered she did a more hell-kitchender racket than a hog-killin'. Yes, sir-r-r! I sampled her. Onct were enough. That settled me.

TILDY

She'd spile the spring. That settles *me.*

HODGE

[*Glowering*]

Listen here, old stick-in-the-muds! It's lucky the likes of you can't stop the march of progress and civilization. It's lucky there's laws to protect big business in doin' God's work in the world. Now, listen; I'm telling yer!

Our modern business and our brand-new railroad are marching up this creek, like a conquering army, to stay here. So either you poor decayed fish sign that paper, take your pile, and clear out; or else we confiscate yer, and out you go, anyway.

Speak lively. Which is it? What's your answer?

LARK

[*Taking up his fiddle again, begins slowly*]

Tildy, ole woman, us two is been hitched twenty year, this night; and nigh ary evenin' I's sot by yan door and tuned her up, this-yere fiddle, on the ole march ditty. I wonder, ole gov'ner, you and me, kin we answer this young feller from yan side.

On up, on up, he says, his spick-span army hit's a-

comin'—the United Mine and Lumber Company, In-cor-po-ráted.

I wonder of hit: ole Napoleon and Alexander the Great, did them two ever git hitched up togither in the ole times? Dad-burn 'em, ef they did, they'd have made a gang of hellyons, I'm a-guessin'; hitched togither, jist the two, like us'ns be.

On up, on up, on up, the old army, crossin' of the Rockies; till ri'chere, in the gap of the ridge-peak we meets up the new inimy—from yan side!

HODGE

Come ahead! Your decision! That's the question.

LARK

Yea, sirree, thar's the question: Which-a-party will give over the gap?

What-all the sperrit kin imagine, the will of man kin conquer hit! [*Turning to* TILDY.] That were our gospel onct, ole gov'ner. *Is hit yit?*

For the capt'in of the new inimy he's a-handin' us now yander quit-paper for us'ns to sign over the gap and surrender hit up.

[*Addressing an invisible host behind* TILDY'S *hickory chair.*] Well, fellers of Napoleon—old army of Amerikee—pioneers of Alexander and Bonaparte, crossin' of the Rockies, *air* we quit? Air we beat? Air we fit-out?

Air us *United States of the Mount'ins* plumb conquered by the *United Mine and Lumber Company, In-cor-po-rá-ted?*

Shall us sign, and surrender the gap?

TILDY

[*Risen half to her feet, supporting herself on her chair-arms, her body trembling, speaks tensely low:*]

Nowise never!

LARK

[*With a triumphant gesture*]

Nowise never! [*Turning to* HODGE] Thar, Mr. Capt'in, you hears the answer; you hears them shoutin' hit yander, the old army: "NOWISE NEVER—NO FURDER!" [*Picking up the paper document, he tears it in two, and hands the pieces to* HODGE.] Take that back to your company—over yan side!

HODGE

[*Rising*]

Sure thing! We'll show yous who owns the gap. Go to hell, and welcome!

[*He starts to scoop up the coins on the table, but stops suddenly as* STEPTOE *strikes a hand heavily on his shoulder, scowling upon him.*]

STEPTOE

It's *you* that's booked for a welcome in hell, Mr. Hodge. I'm ashamed of you.

HODGE

[*Staring*]

I'll be damned!

STEPTOE

You sure will be, unless you apologize to these grand

old friends of mine. [*Under his breath, low and quickly.*] Come across! come across now! Leave it to me. Back down or shut up.

HODGE

[*Floundering, backs away, half incredulous*]

I shut up.

TILDY

[*Faintly alarmed*]

Lark! What's behapp'nin'?

STEPTOE

[*Turning toward them*]

My dear, good friends! Please let his silence serve you for apology. This has been terrible. That I should be so mistaken in any man—actually bring him here to your hospitality! I'm so sorry; so awfully sorry!

LARK

Never harrer your heart, feller alive! Hit's be a-comin', in despite him or you or me. I knewed hit ever sence I fust sighted yan railroad, and heerd the ole Liberty Bell clanklin' hits funeralizin', and hits neck roped to the gallers of an engine biler.

STEPTOE

No, Uncle Lark, not its funeral—not yet, while you and Aunt Tildy hold the gap so gamely. Old Napoleon and Alexander, I salute you! Captains, *you* are the conquerors. I bring you another paper, a

treaty of truce and surrender, from over "yan side." [*He takes from his pocket a sheet of paper.*]

TILDY

What is hit, shorely?

STEPTOE

This, Auntie, is a purchase grant of your property, securing to you and your husband, for value received, the inviolate use of your cabin for all the rest of your lives, and your beautiful spring never to be trespassed or polluted.

LARK

We kin live here allers? Nobody cain't never pack us out?

STEPTOE

Never in the world.

LARK

We possessions this cabin for ourselves?

STEPTOE

Absolutely yours while you live.

TILDY

And nobody cain't tetch my water-spring?

STEPTOE

Nobody. If they do, you can sue them by law.

TILDY

Never dirty hit, nor nuthin', they cain't?

STEPTOE

Never, Auntie. The law protects you, absolutely.

HODGE

[*Looking on from a distance, stifles a guffaw with his hat*]

O Gawd!

TILDY

I reckon, Mr. Steptoe, the good Lor' Jesus sended you ri'chere this night, fer to stanch our sorrers.

LARK

Amen of that! Hit's Bible verity. You's plumb salvationed us, friend.

STEPTOE

Don't mention it, please! It's only my Christian duty, just a little neighborly act. Oh, that reminds me! Last time we met, Uncle, I remember you were hunting a special little giftsake for Aunt Tildy. [*Handing* LARK *a small pink package.*] Does that happen to be what you were looking for?

TILDY

[*Peering forward, eagerly curious*]

Lark, man!

LARK

[*Undoes the package, wonderingly*]

Wropped up hit is, red-pink. God bless my body and— Tildy! Tildy, ole mare! Hit's the pieded

beads! Hit's the neckstring: the purty pieded beads for to clinch the bosom of ye!

TILDY

[*As he reaches her a necklace, strung with many-colored glass*]

O Lor'! The pieded beads!

[*Overcome, she presses them against her breast.*]

LARK

[*Grasping* STEPTOE'S *hands and wringing them*]

Friend feller alive! Hit'll be the death-dyin' of her miseries. Hit's a joy gift. She'll be sproutin' pieded wings in the blades of her back.

TILDY

[*Raptly, holding up the beads*]

God, the Father and Son!

HODGE

[*Under his breath, looking on*]

Putting that over. Hell he does!

STEPTOE

[*Extricating his hands from* LARK'S *clutch*]

Please, Uncle! Please! I'm forgetting another trifle. Aunt Tildy, I remember hearing you say how much you do enjoy to hand Uncle Lark a surprise. It tickles him so, you said. Well, here's a little swap for the beads. Hand him this and watch the tickle!

[*He gives* TILDY *a small blue package, which she hands, in dazed dumbness, to* LARK.]

LARK

[*Unwrapping it, with trembly hands*]

For me, is hit? Wropped sky-blue. Fingers curly and slim like hit were— [*He stares in solemn ecstasy as the blue wrapping-paper flutters to the floor.*] O Singin' Susie!

TILDY

[*Watching*]

Fiddle-strings, is they?

STEPTOE

A new set of strings for the old cedar-box.

LARK

[*Sinking on a chair, bends over the table, his bowed shoulders heaving with big sobs*]

Susie! Ole Susie! The guts is in ye ag'in!

HODGE

[*To himself*]

I'll be double damned!

TILDY

Mr. Steptoe, sir, how's we ever goin' to pay ye our thankful debt? How kin ever us balance hit with Christ'an deeds to ye?

STEPTOE

Oh, that's too easy, Auntie. Just sign this little receipt paper, and forget it. Only remember I'm always your down-creek neighbor.

TILDY

"Handle your neebor the likes of yourself": The Bible says hit, and you *doos* hit, Mr. Steptoe. God love ye for hit. Lark! Lark! What the divil ain't ye speakin' up your thanks for the fiddle-strings? Dumb-brutely air ye, and a Christ'an neebor giftin' us with riches? Have him to think, will ye, an up-creek man were onthankly?

LARK

[*Who has seized his fiddle and is feverishly putting in the new strings, glances up with a momentary wave of the hand*]

Fellers! Real gutses they is, no wire strings! They stretches beautiful: long, smooth, and toughly. Wait a jif till I scrowges the pegs. Ole Napoleon he'll cross over the bridge, four lines abreast!

STEPTOE

[*Handing* TILDY *a tin plate, with the sheet of paper and a fountain-pen*]

Just put your mark here, Aunt Tildy; and then I must be off. The store will be closing up.

TILDY

[*Examining the fountain-pen*]

Hit's a quar quill, hain't hit? Jest my cross at the bottom?

STEPTOE

[*As she signs her mark on the paper*]

That's right.

TILDY

And they cain't never dirty my water-spring?

STEPTOE

[*Taking the signed paper and the pen*]

Never, Auntie. Now where are you going to stow all this pile of money?

TILDY

Stow hit—me? But that's hisn—the Hog man's thar, hain't hit?

STEPTOE

No, indeed; it's all yours. That's the "value received." I'll settle up accounts with Mr. Hodge. Leave it to me.

TILDY

But Lor'-deary, all yan silver and gold leavin's! What would us want hit on the premises? Hit would jist bait a trap for thief-robbers.

STEPTOE

[*Rubbing his chin*]

That's true. I'm afraid so.

TILDY

Could ye, hit maht be, holp me to find a—

STEPTOE

A safe place to store it? Sure, Aunt Tildy, I think so. If you'd like me to safekeep it for you myself—

TILDY

That 'u'd be moughty obleegin', sir.

STEPTOE

All right. When you want any, just ask. I'll be your bank. Delighted to be useful.

[*As* STEPTOE *sweeps the coins back into the bag,* HODGE *slumps down into a chair, with a groan.*]

HODGE

Aw, euchred!

STEPTOE

O Auntie, suppose you keep now this gold eagle coin. Uncle Lark can drill a hole in it, so you can string it for a pendant with your beads.

TILDY

[*Taking the gold coin*]

Yis, yis; the likes of a lucky piece.

STEPTOE

[*Looking at his sheet of paper*]

And now if Uncle Lark will kindly sign this, next to yourself—

TILDY

[*Calling*]

Lark Fiddler! Drap yan Susie, and sot your mark nextly to mine, thar! [*She turns to her beads again.*]

STEPTOE

[*With quick dexterity places the paper under* LARK'S *nose, and hands him the pen, pointing*]

Right here.

[*With difficulty breaking from his absorption in the fiddle-stringing,* LARK *peers from the paper to* STEPTOE'S *face.*]

LARK

That clinches us livin' here for ever, doos hit?

STEPTOE

Forever after, Uncle Lark.

LARK

They cain't never pack us out lawful?

STEPTOE

Never lawfully, Uncle.

LARK

All right, sir-r! Next to Tildy's cross?—Thar

goes! [*He makes his mark.*] I reckon that double crosses 'em—the U-ni-ted Mine and Lumber Company In-cor-po-rá-ted!—Wheeee!

[*With a loud chuckle of mirth, he turns again to his fiddle stringing.*]

STEPTOE

Now, Hodge, your signature as witness, and I guess we're off. [*He hands* HODGE *the pen.*]

HODGE

[*Flourishes it in admiring meditation*]

Steptoe, I'm signing this as your reverent disciple henceforthly! What preferred stock of religion did you say you were putting across?

STEPTOE

Plain Christian brotherhood—*Yanside* United.

HODGE

[*Signing the paper, rises and hands it to* STEPTOE]

United we stand! And what's the latest quotes, in figgers?

STEPTOE

Fifty-fifty, five thousand per, and no *Hog*-squealing!

HODGE

[*Shrugging, with a grunt*]

Hog. Haw! Puttin' that across, too!

STEPTOE

[*Pocketing the paper, takes up the bag, moves toward the door, and calls to* LARK *and* TILDY]

Good night, my dear friends!

LARK

[*Waving his fiddle-bow*]

Heigh! Wait up, thar! She's tauted now for the tunin'. [*He has begun to tune up on the fiddle.*]

STEPTOE

Getting late; promised we'd turn in by dark.

LARK

She's nigh pitched for "*the Rockies.*" You plays hit in the first tunin'—four-chorded a ditty.

[*He begins to test chords with his bow.*]

STEPTOE

Awfully sorry, have to be going. We must forgive our grouchy friend here. He really means all right. I'll haul him over on the road.

TILDY

[*Calling*]

But Mr. Steptoe—

STEPTOE

Good night, Aunt Tildy! God bless you both! Happy wedding anniversary! [*Under his breath,*

poking HODGE *in the ribs, with a sly laugh*] Hoof it now,—Hog!

[*They go out quickly.*]

LARK

[*Hastening to the door with his fiddle*]

Heigh! Hold, thar, fellers! She's primed in the nick. [*Opening wide the half-closed door, he stands on the sill, and calls into the darkness:*] Friend fellers! Heigh, thar!

[*He pauses, listening.*
There is a long moment of silence.]

TILDY

Come in, Lark. Shet the door. Yan Mr. Steptoe he were that Christ'an a gintleman, I guess he war feared we'd outthank him. Come in.

LARK

[*Gazing outdoors*]

Tildy! Hit's a purtiest night in the timber. The little insects is hollerin', and I hears the ole crick croonin' of herself by the splashdam.

TILDY

The water-spring is clean and safe protectit.

LARK

[*Comes in, brooding*]

Yea! Hit's Godawful a beauty in the timber.

[*He closes the door slowly.*]

TILDY

My pieded beads is beautifuller.

LARK

[*Sits down, gazing on his fiddlestrings, entranced*]

Pure genuine gutses!

TILDY

[*Gazing on her beads*]

All rainbow-y they is; bubbly like suds in the sunshine.

LARK

[*Thrumming the strings faintly*]

Low—coarse—middle—and fine.

TILDY

And this same day I tottered thar; and this same night —I clads me in pieded beads!

[*Solemnly she puts the necklace over her head, circling it down to lay low on her bosom.*]

LARK

[*Thrumming more loud*]

What-all the sperrit kin imagine, the will of man kin conquer hit.

TILDY

[*Glancing up*]

Lark, hit's our weddin' birthday.

LARK

[*Suddenly starting up, shakes his body fiercely, as a stallion, rolled over and risen again, snorts his lips trumpeting a neigh-call*]

Yea-a-ay now, ole feller o' mine! Toppled over we was in the pitsome dark of the Dragoon, which he draggled the stars outen heaven down with the tail of him! But we met up the inimy in the gap, and behold, us routed him! Crossin' the Rockies, us routed him down. And now onct more the gutses of the Lord of music is mine; and, lo! now, I'll give ye what ole Napoleon imposed on the peaks of conquerin'—the march what he sung him to the bright and mornin' star. Ring out, Susie!

[*He strikes a fiery chord.*]

March on, ole Bonaparte!!

[*Standing in a rapture of fierce gladness,* LARK *clutches his fiddle, and begins to play strains of a wild march tune, while seated near him, in the light of the hearth and the guttering flame of the lamp-wick,* TILDY *listens, fingering her pieded beads.*]

CURTAIN

THE FUNERALIZING OF CRICKNECK



PERSONS

SAMP GREEN, *the Preacher*
CLAUNDESTY COOTS, *the Widder*
CRICKNECK HEN, *the Departed*
BUB BEALS, *the Jailer*
Pilgrims to the Funeralizing

SCENE

Widder Coots' cabin, in the Kentucky mountains, at the present time

THE FUNERALIZING OF CRICKNECK

Interior of a log-cabin—at twilight of a summer's day.

A sparsely furnished room, lighted dimly from outdoors, at centre, back, by a wide-open door, leading directly upon an outer porch.

At left, down stage, a door—closed—leading also out of doors; in right wall a great fireplace, near which stands a skeining reel, wound with wool yarn; at back, right of door, shelves stuffed with miscellaneous materials; in left upper corner, a four-post double-bed, with deep feather mattress and a coverlid; near the door, left centre, a table with oilcloth cover, set with dishes and a big pail, with gourd-dipper.

The log walls are pasted over with old newspapers, mostly upsidedown and torn off in spots. From the rafters are hanging dried beans and peppers.

Just left of the centre door, rocking herself in a high-backed chair (without rockers), sits WIDDER COOTS, *a shrewd-faced woman of scrawny middle age. Glancing outdoors, she clutches her apron spasmodically, and sobs in rhythm to the high-pitched voice of a Man outside.*

There, standing near the sill of the doorway, the waning sunset reveals Preacher SAMP GREEN—*a*

rubicund, white-haired figure, in shirt-sleeves and suspenders, gesticulating with arms, legs and swayed body to an audience beyond, among whom a few forms are just visible, responding to his emotion amid occasional shouts of many others, unseen.

Holding at times one ear, SAMP *speaks in a rapid intoning, which flows and ebbs with intakings of the breath and hummings of the nose, that culminate in rhythmic pinnacles of stentorian ecstasy.*

As the curtain rises, there is a great shout from outside of "Ay-y-y—men!"

SAMP GREEN

Wha-a-a-a-a-a-ah, brethren!
Listen of the Departed! Listen of the Departed!
He's a gone-un, a gone-un; he's gone the lane o' the world!
And he's ben tooken over the cold streams of Jordan, —n-n-n
and he's ben ferried over by old Abraham, and Isaac he's alended him an oar!—n-n-n
Yea, he's a gone-un, a gone-un!
And he's ben met up yanside by David—my old psalm-booker, David,—which hisself has retched him his harp thar
For to lend him strength to his ankle-bones, and let him to leap and prance—n-n-n
On the cedar-floors of Zion—
Ho-h-h-h-h! Blow ye the trump!

SHOUTS

Blow ye! Ay-y-y-men!

SAMP GREEN

Brethren, listen of the Departed!
He's a gone-un, but he were a father;
yis, he were a father!
He's a gone-un, but he were a hosband;
oh, yis, he were a hosband!
He's a goner, agoner, agone-un: but he were a helpmate;
O Lord, yis, he were a helpmate!
And now her a-settin' thar—
And now her a-settin' thar—

[SAMP *suddenly drops to a commonplace tone of conversation.*]

Brethren and sistren, jist cast your eyes on Mis' Claundesty Coots, his pore ole widder, a-settin' thar!

[*As suddenly he resumes his intoning.*]

And now her a-settin' thar,
she'll never be helpmated by him no more—
helpmated by her ole Hen no more—
till the grave-tomb blossoms—
Oh-h-h-h, the grave-tomb!

SHOUTS

O Lord, the grave-tomb!

WIDDER COOTS

[*Rocking and snuffling*]

O lordy, yis,—the grave-tomb!

SAMP GREEN

Wha-a-a-a-a-a-ah, brethren!

Listen me yit of the Departed—
our dear, diseased brother, Hen Coots, a-bloomin' over thar beyonst the grave-tomb!
And now hit's a-gittin' nigh-on candlelight,—n-n-n
I hadn't oughter took up your time,—n-n-n
but yit I'm all het-up and still goin' hit grand,
and you-all know we've ben at hit here sence early mornin'—n-n-n
and, brethren, though I been afflicted with a sore leg,—
yea, afflicted with a *sore* leg!
yit I reckon I kin still keep the ole Deevil a-pantin'
to ketch up with me.—
Hain't hit so?

SHOUTS

[*Amid scattered laughter*]

Yea, Brother Green! You's got him winded. —A-men!

[*Amid these shouted responses, the door—left—opens and a frowsy-headed Man looks in.*
Stealthily the STRANGER *enters.*
Long blotched moustachios droop from his unshorn cheeks. He is clothed in tattered grey coat and pants, striped with dirty white stripes. He is barefoot, and toes in.
Noiseless, but agile in motion, he moves about unobserved in the dimness, apparently searching for something in various parts of the room.
From the table he slips some food into his pocket. Some he holds in his hand and munches.
Then, as his attention focusses on the continuing words

of the Preacher, he pauses and listens intently, craning forward with head tilted sidewise.]

SAMP GREEN

Yea, then, respectable congregation!
Listen me now of the Departed—
and how hit hain't ben but a leetle bare days o' time,
seems like hit were yisterday, and yit hit were more'n three year ago,
sence ole Hen were here amiddist of us,
Crickneck Hen we callt him, Ole Crickneck. Seems like hit were prophecy,
and him havin' the accident to be hanged for killin' a man,
and the bones of him buried by the gover'ment in quicklime, nobody knows jist whar.—
Yit blow ye the trump of salvation!

SHOUTS

Blow the trump! Blow ye!

WIDDER COOTS

[*Wiping her nose*]

Yis, blow hit!—A-men!

SAMP GREEN

[*Continuing without pause*]

For Glory be, the bridegroom cometh!
The widder withers in her weeds, but the hosband bloometh in his grave-clo'es.—
Yea, the helpmate blossometh and blusheth as a bridegroom,

and behold, the bridegroom he cometh!
Yea, but where doth he cometh?—
Doth he cometh in the flesh of Mortality and the bones of Corruption?
Doth he cometh in the vestiments of Transgression and the mortgages of Mammon?
Kin we see him? Kin we hear him? Kin we smell him, like of yore we done?
No! Never no, smart friends!
He cometh in secret, like a wind in the dark.
He stealeth unbeknownst, like a thief in the night.
For he weareth the stillsome sandals of the Lord-un,
the onsightful garments of the Lord-un and the God-un,
and he onsealeth the vision of his weepful widder,—n-n-n
till lo and behold, she kin see him a-standin' thar—n-n-n
right amiddist of the candlesticks a-burnin' and a-bloomin'—n-n-n
with the Cherubims and Seraphims and Terrapims and Larrapims
of the Lord-un and the God-un and the God-un and the Lord-un—
Wha-a-a-a-a-a-ah, brethren!
The bridegroom he's a-comin'!

SHOUTS

Ho, the bridegroom!—Ay-men!—He's a-comin'!

WIDDER COOTS

He's a-comin' shore. Yis, Amen!

[*As the* PREACHER *suddenly dashes in the doorway and scoops up a dipperful of water from the pail on the table, the* STRANGER *ducks under the table.*]

SAMP GREEN

[*Blowing and sputtering as he gulps and gargles water from the gourd-dipper*]

Ha-ah! Oooh-ha! Sister Claundesty, I axes pardon for suckin' at your gourd this terrible; but when I gits all wropped-up in nature and salvation, I jist has to rinse good to gabble agin.

WIDDER COOTS

Hit's clar mount'in-borned water, Samp Green.—Yea, bless the Lord!

SAMP GREEN

[*Stooping close to her with a look of consoling blandishment*]

Amen, Widder Coots! I'm suckin' hit down to the glory of yan onseen bridegroom—your pore ole Hen, which his home's away-y up in heaven now.

[*The* STRANGER *peeks out around the table leg.*]

WIDDER COOTS

[*Tearfully permitting* SAMP'S *consolation*]

When he war down here to home, my pyore ole Hen never tetched hit, jist only a snack of hit biled to het his corn-whiskey. [*Rocking her chair again.*] Yea, I hope to jine him soon! [*As* SAMP *soothes her with a dallying pat on the shoulder, she elbows him off with*

pleased effrontery.] Get along now, you, and wind up your funeralizin', Samp Preacher!—Yis, Glory to God!

[*While* SAMP *steps back on the porch and resumes his preachment, the* STRANGER *emerges and listens again from behind* WIDDER COOTS.]

SAMP GREEN

Lo, now, brethren and sistren,
Cast uply your eyes to the pieded ramparts of Jerusalem
and look whar I paints ye the everlastin' picture of our Departed Hen
in rainbow colyures right smart untearable-up;
for my tongue don't handle no unlasty, fadin'-out manyfactures.
And so now cast uply your eyes,—n-n-n
and fast 'em on yander rid-bloody aidge of the world thar,
and lo and behold ye whar he's a-crickin' his neck down at us'ns,—
our ole diseased Brother Coots, the new-ris' bridegroom!—
and his head and face burnin' like the sunball,—n-n-n
and his eyes a-bleedin' tears like a lamb ain't-jist-sca'cely-butchered-yit.—
"Weep no more, weepful widder!" he's a-singin' and a-sayin' to ye,
"Don't ye never weep no more!
Caiz here I be, your ole Hen, keepin' house etarnally in Zion;

and though down yander I took me two women afore
you
yit still, Claundesty ole woman,
—Glory be!—there's yit plenty chances for ye;
for ef I ain't much mistaked to myself
weddin' and jinin' in wedlock hain't ben prohibited
thar yit
with them other prohibitations I've heern wind of
sence I were tooken off to this better land.—"
Ho-h-h-h, Zion!

SHOUTS

Yea, Zion!—Hit's a-comin' but hain't here yit.—
Amen!

[*The* STRANGER *smells the nozzle of an empty jug, inverting it with a rueful look.*]

SAMP GREEN

"So listen me, ole widder!"—Hen's a-sayin'—
"You cain't never allers tell, Claundesty,
jist when a new-fresh bridegroom will raise-up and
nominate hisself
to run for election,—n-n-n
and hit mought even be, I'm foretellin' ye,
afore the Seven Stars sets this-yere night behind the
world-palin',
how your widder's tears shall be stanched
and your sorrers be swaged,
and the ole goosefeather bed what Brother Green—
dod bless him!—fotched ye up creek to console
ye,

mought newly be sanctified in the sacriments of holy union.

[*Munching a raw turnip, the* STRANGER *chokes suddenly, and doubles over to stifle a fit of coughing.*]

"Lo, hit's verily I'm a-sayin' unto you, down thar,—
yea, hollerin' from away-y-y fur-off in Zion,
and me utilizin' the breath and body of my dearly beloved brother Samp Green for my oncorruptible *trúm-pet*,—
how ole Brother Samp Green, I have to own hit to ye,
he's handled my funeralizing more handsomer than ary twin-brother could a-did,
and I'll shore report of hit to the Jedgment-seat:
yea, by the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees,
I guarantees him to ye!"
Wha-a-a-a-a-a-ah, brethren!—Ay-y-y-men!

SHOUTS

Ay-y—men!—Yea, Brother Green!—O Godamassy!—Ay-men!

WIDDER COOTS

[*Rocking*]

Godamassy! Godamassy! Godamassy! Yis, Amen!

SAMP GREEN

[*In quiet tone of commonplace*]

And now, brethren and sistren, afore meetin' breaks and ye canter home'ards, let that we sing us together that hymn of meet-up-agin beauty,

"In the Sweet By and By."

[*During the singing of their hymn, the words of which —except the Chorus—they repeat, verse for verse, after the* PREACHER, *some of the* PILGRIMS *outside come in and gather about* WIDDER COOTS *in her chair. There, singing dolorously, they step about in a kind of endless chain of solemn handshaking, to the long-drawn cadence of their hymn-tune.*
Meanwhile, the STRANGER *draws back into the deeper shadow near the bed, where at times he solemnly shakes his own hands in pantomime, and joins very low in the Chorus of the hymn.*]

THE PILGRIMS

[*Singing, as they are led by* SAMP]

"There's a land that is fairer than day,
And by faith we can see hit afar;
For the Father waits over the way,
To prepare us a dwellin' place thar.

[Chorus]

In the sweet by and by,
In the sweet by and by,
We shall meet on that beau—ti—ful shore,
by and by,
In the sweet by and by,
In the sweet by and by, by and by,
We shall meet on that beau—ti—ful shore."

[*At the end of this hymn, as those within pass out-doors, several* PILGRIMS *shake* WIDDER COOTS' *hand, and address her in lugubrious voices.*]

FIRST PILGRIM

Yea, Sister Coots, us'll meet-up with him yit—your ole man. He has outstripped us in the lane o' life, but we's aimin' to jine him in Jesus his obedient death.

WIDDER COOTS

[*Snuffling, happily miserable*]

Thank ye, Brother Si. I feel to foller him.

SECOND PILGRIM

Yis, yis, Claundesty. Hit's gittin' to be a pureless world, but we-all as knewed him is bound to foller your sainted Hen to purifaction.

WIDDER COOTS

Amen, Sister Poll. He shore war contagious to all his friends, yis!

THIRD PILGRIM

I knewed the diseased well, Mis' Coots. He were a friend of unwashed hands. He were a walkin' text of the Ten Commandments. He were the livin' parable of the Sarmon on the Mount'in.

[*In the dimness, the* STRANGER *mounts on the edge of the bed, and stands leaning on the corner post, while he listens.*]

FOURTH PILGRIM

And that's plumb verily! He were a power of glory to the low-down. People is gittin weaker and wiser sence the rope raised him.

WIDDER COOTS

Yea, God riz him in glory. Amen, brother!

FOURTH PILGRIM

Good night, ole sister.

VOICES OUTSIDE

Good night, Brother Green!—Hit's ben a moughtiest funeralizin'.—Tarryin' a bit, air ye?

SAMP GREEN

[*From the porch*]

Yis, Sister Poll. God's leavin' me behind for the widder's mite. Good-night to ye, neebors. Watch-out your nags don't stumble ye in the creek. Hit's a-gittin' darksomer.—Go-od ni-ght!

[SAMP *comes in the doorway, limping slightly. Slipping on a black coat, he eyes Widder Coots with coaxing beneficence, rubs his hands, and looks anticipatingly toward the table.*]

And now, Sister Claundesty!—a leetle grain o' comfort for the in'ard man?

WIDDER COOTS

[*Tilting her chin, affably*]

Eh, then, hit's good-welcome for a God's shepherd what's huntin' a pyore lonesome ewe, to salvation her.

[*With no remnant of her former snuffling voice, she glances up at* SAMP *with a quizzical coyness, and*

hitches her chair nearer the table.] Shove up, Samp! Be socianable.

[*Drawing another chair to the table,* SAMP *sits down. His back is turned three-quarters away from the* STRANGER'S *corner, and he faces toward* WIDDER COOTS, *who sits sideways at the right end of the table, partly facing* SAMP.]

SAMP GREEN

Hit's duskin' here indoors. What's the spread-out?

WIDDER COOTS

Corn pone and sorghum.

SAMP GREEN

Sorghum? And nary two draps of yan corn-liquor what pore ole Hen usetid to weak his spring-water with?

WIDDER COOTS

Nay, pore Hen tuck them draps along of him. He's a-settin' beside them still-waters up aloft yit, I reckon. [*Stretching over, and pointing*]—What's that-thar-a-bulgin' your right britch?

SAMP GREEN

[*Relaxes to a broadening smile*]

Well, now, sister, God bless your sightful eyes! I has to pack hit behind, for to medicine me in my Christ'an ministrations. [*Taking a bottle from his hip-pocket, he sets it before him on the table, eyeing it with satisfaction.*]

[*At this, the* STRANGER *steps down from the bed-post and sits on a low hickory-stool, which he gradually hitches over, without noise, to a vantage-point near the left end of the table, as the dialogue proceeds*]

WIDDER COOTS

I'm guessin' then, you ministers hit to the likes of widders! [*Uncorking and sampling it with approval as the* STRANGER *tugs at his moustachios and swallows hard.*] Lor, yis! Hit's Gospel-true sperrits. [*She corks the bottle again. Then, as* SAMP *reaches for it, she slips it under her skirt.*] Nay, brother! Retch your hand to the corn pone fust.

SAMP GREEN

[*Dumfounded*]

What!

WIDDER COOTS

Fall to hit! I'll watch-on, jist. I's aimin' a leetle to argyfy reeligion with ye; and I allers noted hit with ole Hen, how the keeper of the sperrits holds the karnel of the argyment.

[*The* STRANGER *rubs his nose quizzically, then thumbs it at her.*]

SAMP GREEN

[*Reaching for a dish and beginning to eat*]

Sister Coots, hit's a sight terrible how you women-kind holds things back on your man-kindred. That's how come Temptation and the Fall. Old Eve started hit at the stand-in. She kep' a-holdin' back that-thar

apple on ole Adam; that's why he fell for hit! Ef she'd jist a-said—"Here! Take hit, old feller!" he'd never a-tetched hit.—Like as not he wouldn't never a-raised up his eyes from his corn pone and sorghum.

WIDDER COOTS

Oh, he wouldn't, wouldn't he? [*Slipping out the bottle, she holds it towards him invitingly. He makes a sudden grab for it, but she draws it back quickly, secreting it again.*] I jist 'magined how he wouldn't!

SAMP GREEN

[*With a burst of laughter*]

Aw-haw-haw, Claundesty! You *air* the clever-cutest, up-an'-comin'dest female sence the fust un. And I's sampled the hull hin-yard, from bantams to cochin-chineys,—but *you* shore wins the early-worm prize offen the gang.

WIDDER COOTS

[*Demurely*]

Thank ye, Brother Green.—And what-all mought the prize be?

SAMP GREEN

The prize, now! [*Hitching his chair nearer.*] Well, ma'am, and how would hit like ye to sample of a lame rooster with a white poll, what's God-afflicted with a sore drumstick, but a double lung-bellers for to crow *Salvation!* ary time he spies a new egg in the nest?

WIDDER COOTS

Oh, then! And is hit this-yer lame rooster as spyin' round for a nest-egg, *fust*-offly?

SAMP GREEN

Ye're treadin' nigh, sister! A leetle, comfortable, cozy-warm nest-egg—hit's plumb the thing he's a spyin' for. Have ye seed ary?

[*The* STRANGER, *low seated, peeps his brow and eyes over the table-edge, left.*]

WIDDER COOTS

[*Drawing back*]

Hit jist *maht* be I have! But I 'needs fust for to argyfy hit with ye, releegious.

SAMP GREEN

[*Turning again to finish off his corn pone*]

Lordamighty, ain't the woman-kind quar deevils! Hit's a roundybout lane of releegionin' what leads to love, but they allers prefers hit to the straight-and-narrer short-cut!—Shoot your text, ole sister.

WIDDER COOTS

[*With nervous embarrassment*]

Kin I confidence ye, Samp?

SAMP GREEN

Ain't I a caller of the Gospel, and a comforter of widders?

WIDDER COOTS

Well, then, hit's a Bible Commandment—the Eighth of Moses.

SAMP GREEN

[*Starting*]

Thou shalt not steal!—Claundesty!

[*The* STRANGER'S *head pops up higher.*]

WIDDER COOTS

Ye needsn't glower me like that. I never stoled nothin' yit—sightly: I only hided hit, jist.

SAMP GREEN

Hided hit—what?

WIDDER COOTS

That nest-egg—what else! Fust-offly hit were hided away secret by my ole man, afore the Lord buried him in quick-lime. He were a stinkin'dest mean ole miser, dad drattle him! He were that covetin' he'd grutch me a leathern button to live on. But he passed to Glory, bless him! and 'bout a year ago I come acrosst his savin'-pile; so I hided hit agin.

SAMP GREEN

What-for hided hit?

WIDDER COOTS

Away from his kin-heirs, o' course. [*The* STRANGER *leans his arms on the table-edge, as he cricks his head forward intently.*] Ye see, I never borned Hen Coots

no child. But his second woman—the one afore me —borned him six what's livin', and when the ole man passed, they come snoopin' round the cabin here for his lawful leavin's. So I jist hided what I found, and Hen's chillun never knewed about hit. [*Anxiously.*] Now, Samp, I wants for to axe ye,—and you a Gospeller: war that a Bible-sinnin'—me hidin' yan nest-egg away from Hen's airthly kin-heirs? Were hit—stealin'?

SAMP GREEN

[*After a slight pause*]

How big were the egg?

WIDDER COOTS

[*After another pause*]

The bigness of three hunderd dollars.

SAMP GREEN

[*Quickly*]

Three hunderd?—No-o! That were jist thrift, Claundesty. Hit ain't no sin-stealin'—bein' thrifty. Three hunderd is pimeblank thrift.

WIDDER COOTS

[*With a sigh of reassurance*]

Thank ye, Samp.

[*Another pause.—The* STRANGER *half rises.*]

SAMP GREEN

[*In a low voice*]

Where-all did ye hide hit?

WIDDER COOTS

Well, Samp, bein' I were aimin' to steer safe, airthly *and* heavenly, I divided hit halfly—one half for to possession hit bodily, and t'other half more sperritual-like. So the fust half I packs here in my petticoat.

[*Lifting her outer skirt,* WIDDER COOTS *fumbles for a moment at an inner pocket and pulls forth a greenish wad of folded bills,—her actions the while being eagerly watched by the brightening eyes of* SAMP GREEN, *and—from behind him—by the intenser scrutiny of the* STRANGER, *now risen and drawn nearer.*]

SAMP GREEN

And that's only *half* ye have thar?

WIDDER COOTS

Light the taller. Yan's a strike-match. Shet the door to!

[*Shutting the door,* SAMP *hastily lights a candle, as the* STRANGER *ducks low behind the table again.*]

SAMP GREEN

Greenbacks, is hit?—Retch me your hand till I count the cards.

WIDDER COOTS

[*Retaining the bills*]

There's anither count comes afore that, Samp Green. Jack Trump is fair swappin' for Right Bower. Retch me hit here!

SAMP GREEN

Retch ye what?

WIDDER COOTS

That fine-purty courtin' card ye promised me, last time ye come totin' the goosefeather bed.

SAMP GREEN

[*Scratching his chin*]

Courtin' card?

WIDDER COOTS

Yan law-paper, and hit to be signed with the red seal of his honor, the Peace Justice.

SAMP GREEN

[*With sly laughter*]

Lor', Lor', Claundesty! And ef you ain't a sight for remembrancin' the fergitful! [*Taking from his coat pocket a folded piece of foolscap paper, he unfolds it, revealing a big red paper seal at the bottom.*] Is hit this-yere you're referrin' of?

WIDDER COOTS

[*Gazing at it*]

Amen, at last!—The red seal!

SAMP GREEN

I bargained hit yisterday, on the chanct of tradin' hit to-night. [*Holding it out.*] Will ye swap now?

[*As the* STRANGER'S *head bobs above the water-pail,* WIDDER COOTS *solemnly exchanges with* SAMP *her wad of bills for the red-sealed foolscap.*]

WIDDER COOTS

The Lord doos shepherd his lonesome!

[*Bending their heads close together in the candlelight, the two pore upon their respective exchanges, fingering them and muttering to themselves half audibly.*]

SAMP GREEN

[*Concluding his count*]

One forty-five, one forty-seven, forty-eight, forty-nine, one hunderd fifty.—Half, jist.

WIDDER COOTS

[*Turning her document at various angles*]

Samp, you foller writin'. How doos hit read out?

SAMP GREEN

[*Slowly reading the foolscap aloud*]

"To Them what This-yere Consarns—
Take notiss—

Samp Green, Reverend, and Claundesty Coots, Widder to the late Hen, has This-yere License for to marry Theirselves.

By my hand and seal.

Amen.

Hi Skidmore

Peace Justice."

WIDDER COOTS

[*Verging toward the lachrimose*]

The red-seal license! O Samp,—Claundesty *Green!*

[*She leans toward him alluringly.* SAMP *is just about to embrace her, but draws back, collecting himself.*]

SAMP GREEN

[*With restraint*]

Not yit, Sister Coots. Where's yan balanct half?

WIDDER COOTS

[*Straightening up*]

Which balanct?

[*The* STRANGER *cocks his head.*]

SAMP GREEN

Well, here's the yolk of the nest-egg, but where's the white of hit? Where did ye hide that-thar releegious half ye spoke on—t'other one-fifty?

[*The* STRANGER *rises to his feet.*]

WIDDER COOTS

Ef I tells ye, will you do me the next axin' I axes ye?

SAMP GREEN

Yis; ef God will impower me. Now, so! Where's the balanct?

WIDDER COOTS

Why, then I's tell ye. Bein' hit were kindly the likes of a Bible temptation, I jist hided hit in the fruits of the Tree o' Paradise.

SAMP GREEN

[*Gaping*]

The Tree o' Paradise!

WIDDER COOTS

Yis, Samp. Hit's sewed up in my bed-kivver.

SAMP GREEN

Oh! In the pattern of the quiltin', is hit?

WIDDER COOTS

Yis, hit's sewed in the Tree pattern o' Paradise, which hit bears three apple-fruits. So I lined 'em inside with the greenbacks in place o' lamb's wool. Hit plumps 'em out, right smart purty and round.

[*Precipitately, the* STRANGER *ducks to the floor, crawls swiftly to the side of the bed, where—sitting back-to on the floor—he pulls off the coverlid over his own shoulders, till he is almost concealed under it. Thus he proceeds to divest himself of his striped garments, giving ear meanwhile to the conversation of the couple.*]

SAMP GREEN

And you hided the money in the round, red apple-fruits of old Eva!

WIDDER COOTS

Yis. Hit were the bed-kivver I quilted for ole Hen, when me and him was married, me bein' his third woman. Hen choosed hit hisself, the Tree pattern. Hit were a parable, he says. So he axed me to tuck-in three apples, and them scarlet-red, 'cause they was *three* Evas, he says, what had tempted him three times to defy Providence with tastin' the fruits of knowledge.

SAMP GREEN

[*Starting up*]

Dad bless ye, then! Yan Tree is the one I chooses to sleep under this night—and my nose peekin' out where I kin jist smell o' them apple-fruits, round and ripe-ready to drap in my mouth.

WIDDER COOTS

Set down, man! Don't git too hasty-passioned for slumber. They's more yit releegious matters for to be conseedered.

SAMP GREEN

[*Sitting down again, reluctantly*]

Claundesty, I'm ruined out with releegionin'! After funeralizin' I allers craves for goosefeathers. Hit's the lonely callin' of man-nature. So I'm thinkin' hit's the nick o' time for us'ns to be nappin' off under that-

thar kivver o' Paradise—and you with the license under your nose.

WIDDER COOTS

Samp Green, don't you be temptifyin' now! Ef I war to belisten ye, my ole Hen would hant us in our sinfulment. Yea, likely he's a-watchin' of us now from the banks o' Jordan. So hit's more jist than ary license of a Peace Justice we needs to sanctify us in union.

SAMP GREEN

And what more, then?

WIDDER COOTS

We needs a weddin' sarvice, and hit proper spoke by a Holy Gospel preacher.—That's the next axin' what ye promised to do me.

SAMP GREEN

[*Jovially*]

And God He's impowerin' me to do hit. Glory be, He's answered us our needcessity.—Air ye ready for the holy question, Claundesty?

[WIDDER COOTS *looks up, archly doubtful. In the corner, the* STRANGER—*rolling up his striped garments—pokes them in a bundle under the nearest bed-pillow, his bare arms reaching from the quilting which swathes him.*]

WIDDER COOTS

[*To* SAMP]

And who'll be that holy to question hit?

SAMP GREEN

The Reverend Brother Green, o' course. Ain't I your Gospel minister?

WIDDER COOTS

Yis, Samp. But kin you ministrate to your own weddin' ciremony?

SAMP GREEN

Kin I? Why cain't I? Cain't a tooth-doctor pull his own teeth?—He shorely *kin;* but shorely he *won't,* without fust he gits some healin' medicine handy. [*With a sly laugh.*] Kin you hand over now yan leetle britch-bottle ye borrered?

WIDDER COOTS

[*Slowly taking out the whiskey bottle, returns his laugh and the bottle*]

Yis, Samp: I hands ye back the karnel o' the argyment.

SAMP GREEN

That's bridely spoke.—We'll top off with hit.

[*He places the bottle carefully beyond her reach, near the left end of the table.*
As he turns again towards her, the STRANGER *in the bed-cover stealthily approaches the table.*

SAMP *grasps the* WIDDER'S *cheeks in both hands.*]

Hit arns ye the ciremonious kiss beforehand. [*He smacks loudly her upturned face.*] Now listen me!

[*Deepening his tone to the voice of preachment.*]

Samp Green, do you take this-yere woman, Claundesty, for to be your lawful wedded wife?

[*Resuming his voice of conversation.*] I do.

[*Deepening his tone again.*] Claundesty Coots, do you take this-yere man, Samp, for to be your lawful wedded hosband?

WIDDER COOTS

[*Snapping the words with unction*]

I shore doos!

[*Hardly has she spoken when the candle-flame goes out with a sudden loud-sounding puff, blown surreptitiously by the* STRANGER.
This is followed by darkness and several seconds of utter silence, broken only by a faint sound of motion, which ceases on the right of the room.
Another dead pause is broken by their whispered voices, as WIDDER COOTS *gasps:*]

Godamassy!

SAMP GREEN

Amen!

WIDDER COOTS

What done hit?—A wind?

SAMP GREEN

Hit weren't no wind. The door's shet.

[*The sound recurs.*]

WIDDER COOTS

Retch me your hand.—Kin you hear a stirrin'?

SAMP GREEN

[*Huskily*]

I kin.

WIDDER COOTS

O God, Samp!—pray a leetle.

SAMP GREEN

I cain't. I'm parched.

WIDDER COOTS

Blaze a match, then.

SAMP GREEN

I cain't. I don't find nary.

WIDDER COOTS

Hunt one quick. I'll call God to holp ye.

[SAMP *gropes about.* WIDDER COOTS *calls faintly in nasal-chanting prayer*:]

O God of cr'ation, Thou what saidest— Let hit be light!
O God of No-ay, Thou what didest bang the door on him in the old Ark, and yit Thou didest open hit up agin!
O Jehovey! Give ye remember your ole preacher Samp Green, down here in the dark now!
Retch him a strike-match, O Lord, and him a-huntin' round in the supper dishes—

SAMP GREEN

[*Striking a match*]

Amen, Claundesty! [*Relighting the candle.*] You's got Jehovey right smart answerin' of ye.

WIDDER COOTS

How candlelight doos confidence the eyes!

SAMP GREEN

[*Whistling out loud*]

Yis, and the sperrits, too! I reckon hit warn't nothin' but a wind. [*Reaching for his bottle on the table, his voice shrinks again to a whisper.*] Lor' be! —the liquor!

WIDDER COOTS

Where is hit—the bottle?

SAMP GREEN

[*Dumfounded*]

You seed me sot hit ri'chere. That-thar wind must a-blewed hit.

WIDDER COOTS

[*Suspiciously*]

The wind, were hit? Let me to sight your other britch. Turn arounct!

SAMP GREEN

[*Turning, lifts his coat tails, to show his back pockets*]

Feel hit yourself. Both the back pokes is empty.

WIDDER COOTS

[*Investigating, speaks with awe*]

Yea, amassy!—I'm skeered, Samp.

SAMP GREEN

Air ye? Don't be. Hit's ketchin'.

[*Both speak in lower and lower voices.*]

WIDDER COOTS

[*Glancing over right, then looking away*]

I'm skeered what else that wind mought have blewed away.—Them greenbacks.

SAMP GREEN

I've got 'em safe here in my fist.

WIDDER COOTS

Yis, but the balanct.

SAMP GREEN

Goshun!—The bed-kivver!

[*He starts toward the bed with the candle.*]

WIDDER COOTS

Never look on the bed.

[*Very low, pointing right.*] Look ayander.

[*Dimly, against the deep fireplace, a spottle-colored, cone-shaped mass of* COVERLID *huddles near the skein-*

ing-reel, with which a moving dusky thread of yarn connects it, as the arms of the reel turn slowly.]

SAMP GREEN

[*Staring*]

What is hit?

WIDDER COOTS

Hit's the kivver. Hit's blewed over.—Fetch the light.

[*As* WIDDER COOTS *and* SAMP—*raising the candle high in his right hand—slowly approach the dim mass,* THREE ROUND, RED SPLOTCHES *glimmer more brightly on a background of green and brown. Momentarily the reel has stopped moving.*]

SAMP GREEN

[*Pausing*]

Is them the red apple-fruits?

WIDDER COOTS

Yis: hit's the Tree o' Paradise.

SAMP GREEN

Lor, Claundesty! The reel—is hit turnin'?

WIDDER COOTS

[*In a whisper*]

Yis: the kivver's onskeinin' hit.

SAMP GREEN

Is you crazin'?—Kin a bed-kivver peel yarn to hitself?

[*The reel gives a loud, snapping click.*

SAMP *jumps backward in terror, dragging* WIDDER COOTS *several paces.*]

Let go me, woman! Hit's witchery!

[*He tries to pull away from her, left.*]

WIDDER COOTS

[*Clinging to him*]

Samp! You'll never not be quittin' of me now—and us new wedlocked!

SAMP GREEN

Why wouldn't I? And you lettin'-in a witch-deevil on a puff o' the wind, and hit snoopin' my corn-liquor, and now hit wamblin' yarn to hitself in a Paradise bed-kivver!—Onloost me!

[*Amid this commotion, the shroudy wedge of the* BED-COVER *has begun to move toward the centre door, trailing yarn from the reel.*]

WIDDER COOTS

[*Clinging tighter*]

Listen me! Look! Hit's scuttlin' the likes of a craw-dab.—Stop hit goin'!

SAMP GREEN

Yan's no craw-fish o' nature. Hit's a deevil-fish creationed of Sattan. I'll git us a charm-doctor. Onloost me!

[*He flings her off toward the centre, and starts away for the left door.*]

WIDDER COOTS

[*Desperately*]

Come back, man! Yan Tree o' Paradise is spreadin' hits limbs to this porch door, *with one-hunderd-fifty in the fruits of hit!*—Samp Green, ef be you're a true Bible preacher, you'll come over here quick and collect the balanct.

[*As* WIDDER COOTS *intercepts its passage to the door,* the BED-COVER *pauses.*]

SAMP GREEN

[*Broken in resolution*]

One-hunderd-fifty— But how kin I collect hit?

WIDDER COOTS

Jist challenge hit with the Word o' God. That'll clinch hit.

SAMP GREEN

One-hunderd-fifty.—Well, then.

[*Stepping forward gingerly,* SAMP *approaches the huddled* BED-COVER, *which now is moving back toward the fireplace. Following it, he starts fearfully back, as a glimpse of two hairy legs is revealed by a lift of the quilting.*]

No, no, woman! I cain't. Hit's bare-leggy!

WIDDER COOTS

Chanct hit, man! Chanct hit with the Word o' God.

[*In the candlelight, the* BED-COVER *pauses near the reel.*]

SAMP GREEN

[*In rapid perturbation—keeping safe distance*]

"In the beginnin' were the Word, and the Word were with God, and the Word hit were God."
"Speak up, Sattan, or forever clare out o' yan Paradise.

[*From under the quilting there pipes a thin, muffled Voice*]

THE VOICE

Claundesty!

[SAMP *and the* WIDDER *clutch each other again.*]

WIDDER COOTS

O Jedgment!

THE VOICE

[*After a pause*]

Claundesty Coots!

SAMP GREEN

[*In horror*]

Hit's ownin' up your name.—Ye're lostid, woman.

WIDDER COOTS

[*Gripping* SAMP'S *arm*]

O God! The voice of hit!

[*Slowly now the coned peak of the quilting drops back, and there—above the red-fruited pattern of the Tree*

of Paradise—the frowzled head and naked shoulders of THE STRANGER *rise horridly in the candleshine. Cramping his head toward the* WIDDER, *he drones in a high-pitched drawling.*]

THE STRANGER

Claundesty, ole woman! Where did ye hided my pants?

WIDDER COOTS

[*Screaming*]

Hit's *him!*

SAMP GREEN

[*Rigidly*]

Who?

WIDDER COOTS

Hit's the hant of him—and hit crickin' hits ole neck yit. Oh, salvation me!

SAMP GREEN

[*Turning protective at this appeal*]

Who air ye, deevil?

THE STRANGER

[*Grinning quizzically*]

Behold, the bridegroom cometh!

[*Twisting off the thread of yarn, he takes a coiled skein of it from his bosom and winds it like a rope about his middle, belting the quilt in.*]

WIDDER COOTS

Hit's him—my ole Hen, loost from heaven!

SAMP GREEN

Loost from hell, hit is!

[*He sinks back on a chair by the table, on which he puts down the candle.*]

THE STRANGER

[*Moving forward slowly*]

Naked I come into the world, and naked I riz outen hit. And nary a britch did ye bury me with, ole woman, for to go walkin' the Maiden's Milk Paths and knockin' at the gates of the Cherubims.—And so I's drapped in to borrer me a bed-kivver, and a bit of wool-yarn to belt me up.

WIDDER COOTS

O Godamighty, Hen, I never buried ye. I never seen ye dead. They told me how they laid ye down in quick-lime—and you jist drappin' from the gallers-tree.

THE STRANGER

Yis, and me now jist risin' in the Tree o' Paradise. I's heern how they told ye, and I's heern how ye told yan Word o' God preacher what ye hided in these-yere red apple-fruits.

WIDDER COOTS

Shore, ole hosband, you won't be wantin' *them* where ye're goin' back, and you a ghosted sperrit?

THE STRANGER

Who said I were goin' back?

WIDDER COOTS

Ah! And will ye be hantin' me for allers?

THE STRANGER

For allers—till I gits what I come fer.

WIDDER COOTS

What is hit, Hen? Axe only, and I's proudly give hit ye.

THE STRANGER

I axed ye a'riddy, fust-offly: *Where is my pants?*

WIDDER COOTS

[*Hastening to the back-wall shelves*]

Here they is, shorely.

THE STRANGER

And the galluses, mind ye!

WIDDER COOTS

They's button-holed onto 'em. [*Fetching forth a pair of ancient pants and suspenders, she offers them eagerly.*] Here they is, bothly.

THE STRANGER

[*Craning an ear to the left as if listening, points right*]

Hang 'em yander by the fireboard.

WIDDER COOTS

Yander? [*She hangs them on a shelf nail, then speaks anxiously.*] Air ye tarryin' yit?

THE STRANGER

Yis, Claundesty. I's tarryin' till I gits shet of old Beelzybub, which he's trackin' me now to these-yere diggin's.

WIDDER COOTS

What-fur trackin' ye—Beelzybub!

THE STRANGER

Oh, he's aimin' to captive me for hisn, the ole Divvil, jist to spite Godamighty what claimed me fust for his angels. Hark ayander now! Yea, hit's him comin'. I hears his hoof on the steppy-stones!

WIDDER COOTS

[*Shaking* SAMP *wildly*]

Git up, Samp. The deevil's comin'!

[SAMP *staggers up, half dazed.*]

SAMP

Git me behind thee, Sattan!

THE STRANGER

Ef he axes ye, have you seed my sperrit walkin', tell him you seed me scootin' by, an hour sence, headin' for the north star.

Kneel down, now! Shet your eyes! Hark for the voice of thunder, and pray for salvation.

[*As* SAMP *and* WIDDER COOTS *fall to their knees, mumbling, the* STRANGER *blows out the candle again. Outside, from the left, heavy footsteps are heard, and loud knocking thunders on the side door.*]

A DEEP HARSH VOICE

[*Calls from outdoors*]

Who's thar?

[*As this is answered only by inarticulate prayer-sounds from the kneeling couple, the side door is shoved partly open and admits one huge, hairy arm, gripping an iron lantern, which illumines a dirty, black-bearded face scowling from a pointed cap. The* NEW-COMER *bellows again.*]

Who's to home, thar?

[*Entering, he stands in the doorway—an immense, gaunt figure in big boots and mountainy garb. Swinging the lantern, he stares round him. The* STRANGER *in the quilt is nowhere visible. Soon the* NEW-COMER *discerns the couple kneeling, comes forward and bawls at them:*]

Hain't nobody got nothin' but knees here!—What's goin' for'ard?

SAMP GREEN

Hit's a prayer-meet.

THE NEW-COMER

[*High-stepping backward on tiptoe*]

Is *that* what I's stepped on?

WIDDER COOTS

[*Poking* SAMP *with her elbow*]

Axe him his errant.

SAMP GREEN

[*Still on his knees, dreadfully*]

Where-all do ye hail from, brother?

THE NEW-COMER

I hails from Die-Easy Creek, and I's huntin' a skip-the-roost jail-bird. Have ye seed ary un hereabout?

SAMP GREEN

What likes is he, brother?

THE NEW-COMER

He's a grey-and-white striper, with a crick in his neck, and feet-prints the likes of a poultry-hen, toein' in with the nail-prints. Have ye seed a sich?

SAMP GREEN

A crickneck? Yis, brother. I seed a sich scootin' by, an hour sence, and him headin' for the north star.

THE NEW-COMER

And that's quare. An hour sence, the north star

warn't sightly yit. [*Suspiciously.*] I reckon I's take a sniff round the premises.

[*He starts for the door, left.*]

WIDDER COOTS

[*Rising*]

Jest a minute, Mister Stranger! What-all did you say mought be the name of yan Crickneck?

THE NEW-COMER

Well, ma'am, he calls hisself all ways of a weather. Accordin' to the wind blowin', he varies from Culpepper to Coots. Three year ago he were hanged for Coots, and last week he broke jail for Culpepper. So I's huntin' him.

WIDDER COOTS

And who-all did you say *you* mought be, sir?

THE NEW-COMER

Me, ma'am? My name's Beals; Bub Beals; Bealsy Bub, some calls me. Hain't you-all heern o' me? I'm County Jailer from Die-Easy. Last 'lection, I polled more majority than the Soopreme Jedge of the Circuit. Much obleeged for to have your vote, fellers, the next primary.

[*To* SAMP, *who has taken off his coat and begun to mutter aloud again in prayer.*]

Well, brother! I gives ye five minutes more of that knee-prayin'. Then I'll be back ag'in.

[*With a wave of the lantern, he goes out, left, closing the door.*
In the resulting darkness, almost immediately, SAMP *strikes a match and relights the candle.*]

SAMP GREEN

I kep' a light this time, Claundesty.

WIDDER COOTS

Lor'! What releegious expeerincin's! Samp, I'll never git to fergit *this* weddin' night.

SAMP GREEN

[*Looking about nervously*]

Nor me, nuther! Is hit gone—the hant? Yis, Glory be—!

WIDDER COOTS

[*Pointing left*]

Shet ye! He's a-comin'.

[*From black depths of the great fireplace, the* STRANGER *emerges, clothed in the ancient pants, above which he is bare, save for the suspenders.*
Over one arm and shoulder is flung the bed-cover, in the pattern of which he is digging the point of a long knife-blade.
As he comes forward in the candlelight, he drawls with an imitative intoning.]

THE STRANGER

Yea, he cometh! But where doth he cometh?
Doth he cometh in the flesh of Mortality and the bones of Corruption?—n-n-n

Doth he cometh in the vestiments of Transgression,
and the mortgages of Mammon?—n-n-n
No! Never no, smart friends!
He weareth the onsightful garments of the Lord-un;
He onsealeth the vision of his weepful widder.—

[*Dropping into conversation*]

Hain't that how hit sarmons, Brother Green?

[*Closing a bolt-bar on the door, centre, he points to the left one.*]

Slip the bar on the door yander, will ye?

[SAMP *does so.*]

WIDDER COOTS

[*With sharp self-control*]

Hen Coots, time is testifyin' fast. Thot-thar County Jailer is a-comin' back ag'in in five minutes. So, now ye've got your pants on, I'm advisin' ye to quit-up this-here hantin', and to head ye for the pole star, or the Southren Cross, or ary heavenly body whar the quicklime is quickest to consume ye agin.

THE STRANGER

[*Grinning*]

Hit shore sounds nacherly to listen of your advisements, ole woman. But how-all *kin* a *hant* quit-up hantin'?

[*He continues to pick with his knife-blade.*]

WIDDER COOTS

[*Exclaiming*]

How's that you's spilin' my bed-kivver!

THE STRANGER

Oh, jist I were corin' these-yere apple-fruits. The skins was shore red-ripe on the out'ards, but the inside cores was all purely green.—Look at 'em! [*He pulls from his pockets a handful of loose greenbacks. As he shows them, and continues to talk on,* SAMP *and* WIDDER COOTS *exchange in pantomime looks of appalled and discomfited defeat.*] And all my poor kin-heirs aimin' to gather sich plumpy fruits—and them yit green and onripened!

Don't hit give ye dyspepsy, Brother Samp, jist to lay eyes on 'em?—and yan County Jailer to spy ye tastin' of 'em?—Green *stolen* fruits!

O laws of man and the Bible!

Yis, yis, weepful widders both: he's shore a-comin' back ag'in, that Jailer divvil. And afore time gits to testifyin' *too* fast,—Reverend Brother Samp, I says, —wouldn't ye better hand me over now the balanct o' them ither green fruits thar?

[SAMP *fumbles with the greenbacks on the table.*]

No?—Not yit?

Well, speakin' of laws and Bible Commandments, there's the Eighthly and Tenthly: *Thou shalt not—steal,* is hit? And how doos your Bible say about Neebor's Wives, Brother Green?—*Thou shalt not never covet 'em behind a bed-kivver;* is that hit?

O laws of thievery and man-bigamy! How the jails is full-up with neebors and neebors' widders!
But listen now!
What ef your neebor were a *hant,* fellers?
Kin a ole widder steal from a hant? Kin a ole neebor covet a hant's wife?
No, sister. A hant cain't nowise be stole from. A hant ain't consarned with no thievery—nor widders' nest-eggs.
So, fellers, I's weighin' *all* the chances, and I's strikin' this-yere balanct for all on us:
Tooken in time, hants comes cheap; and this-yere specimen is one in a life-time for bargain price.—
Jist one-hunderd-fifty from each of ye, and the shinin' portals of Zion closes behind me, world without end! So you'll never sot eyes on me ag'in till after Jedgment.—
How is hit *now* with ye, brother?

[*Consulting* WIDDER COOTS *in pantomime,* SAMP *yields reluctantly to her grim nod, and hands over the pile of greenbacks to the* STRANGER, *who takes them smiling.*]

I—I jist thought hit were that-a-way with ye!

[*Then, picking up* SAMP'S *black swallowtail coat from the floor—where* SAMP *laid it when praying—the* STRANGER *puts the greenbacks in the pocket of it, and slips the coat on himself.*]

And now—for to clinch feller-feelin's betwixt hants and humans—I'm remembrancin' ye both for your weddin' party.
Ole Sister Claundesty, I's giftin' ye with this-yere bed-

kivver; [*He hangs the quilt on the bed-post.*] and maht the Paradise boughs of hit ripen a fresh crap of fruits for ye, and drap them down in goosefeathers!

WIDDER COOTS

[*Following him, curious*]

Thank ye, Hen.

THE STRANGER

Ole Twin-brother Samp, I's feein' ye five bucks for that-thar funeralizin'; [*He hands* SAMP *a greenback.*] for you shore did handle me more handsomer than ary twin-brother; and I'll shore report of hit to the Jedgment-seat.

SAMP GREEN

[*As he takes the five-dollar bill*]

I's humbly gratesome, Brother Coots.

THE STRANGER

[*Looking from one to the other*]

Well, halloa! 'Pears like ye're both lackin' sperrits. Wait, then, fellers. Set down.

[*He sits with them at the table. Moving forward two tin cups, he lifts one, and takes out the bottle from his pocket, turning to* SAMP.]

Kin I sperrit ye with this-here, Brother?

SAMP GREEN

[*With social relish*]

Yea, dad bless hit now! Hit's an ill wind what never blewed corn-liquor.

THE STRANGER

[*Pours into* SAMP'S *cup, then turns to* WIDDER COOTS]

Kin I medicine to you hitself, Sister?

WIDDER COOTS

Yis, amen!

THE STRANGER

[*Partly filling her cup, lifts the bottle and rises from his seat*]

Then, here, feller widders, finaciously I rises to farewell ye!
Stand up with me, Brother Green, and drink to yan widder-bride betwixt us:
Here's unhanted, airthly bliss to her, and a sperrituous endin'!

[SAMP *rises, and both are just beginning to drink, when a sharp knock bangs on the door, left, and the* JAILER'S *deep voice calls from outside.*]

THE VOICE

Heigh, yous! Ye've slipped the bar. Open hit!

THE STRANGER

[*Starts back, dropping his voice low*]

Hit's Bub!—Mind ye: I'm a *hant,* headin' *north for* the Sweet By and By.—

[*He slips swiftly to the centre door, unbars it, motions* SAMP *to unbar the other, and hums low from the open doorway, as he waves to them*:]

"Till we meet on that beau—ti—ful shore!"

[*The centre door is just closing upon him, as the side door—unbarred by* SAMP—*is opening upon the* JAILER, *who steps in and sways his lantern in various parts of the room.*]

THE JAILER

[*Greeting the two*]

So ye're prayed-up, air ye?—There ain't no signs of him in the outbuildin's. [*To* SAMP]—An hour ago ye seed him?

SAMP GREEN

Yis, brother.

THE JAILER

[*Looking under the bed*]

And him headin' north, you says?

SAMP GREEN

Yis, brother: headin' hit plumb north.

THE JAILER

So!—Well, I'd ought to ketch him up by moonrise. I'm movin' on. Good night to ye!

[*He hurries out again, left.*]

[SAMP *looks after him. After a silent pause,* SAMP *starts uneasily to follow.*]

SAMP GREEN

Good night, he says.—Mebbe I's be movin' on, too.

WIDDER COOTS

[*Flabbergasted*]

Movin' on!

SAMP GREEN

[*Sheepishly*]

Yis, I reckon. Your ole Hen has shore hatched that nest-egg for hisself.—What's left for us'ns now?

WIDDER COOTS

[*Taking out the foolscap paper, clutches at his coat, appealingly*]

Ain't there love and a license yit, Samp? And you shore ain't fergit how you fotcht me the goosefeathers!

SAMP GREEN

Yis, but—

[*The centre door opens suddenly, and the* STRANGER *steps in again, closing it.*]

THE STRANGER

Claundesty!

WIDDER COOTS

[*Jumping*]

Lor', Hen! Ain't you gone quit us till after Jedgment?

THE STRANGER

Jedgment is after *me,* woman!—Headin' north, is he?

WIDDER COOTS

Yis.

THE STRANGER

Then pray for me clingin' to the Southren Cross!—[*He starts away, but stops quickly.*] Oh,—Brother Green!

SAMP GREEN

What's now?

THE STRANGER

I were clare fergittin'.—One thing I'm inheritin' to ye in wedlock.

SAMP GREEN

What is hit, brother?

THE STRANGER

Hit's the raiment of the bridegroom, what weds a double-hosbanded wife.—Retch your hand in, under the nigh piller!

[*With a blown kiss to* WIDDER COOTS, *he grabs the* PREACHER'S *hat from a peg, and darts out again, closing the door.*]

SAMP GREEN

[*Moving bewildered to the bedstead*]

The nigh piller—retch my hand under—

WIDDER COOTS

[*Following him, curious*]

Retch hit keerful!

[*Reaching under the nearest pillow,* SAMP *draws forth a dirty bundle, unfolding* HEN'S *two divested garments with grey-and-white stripes.*]

WIDDER COOTS

[*As* SAMP *holds them out in both hands*]

Weddin' gear?

SAMP GREEN

[*Staring*]

Jail gear.

WIDDER COOTS

Massiful!

SAMP GREEN

[*Awesomely*]

I ain't jist aimin' to resk hit.—Hit's moughty tickle-some.

[*Drooping, he shifts toward the door again.*]

WIDDER COOTS

[*In fond trepidation*]

Why is hit, Samp?—Yonder's the Tree o' Paradise yit greenin' for us, and yere's the red seal for a new-fresh apple-fruit—Samp!—and you's spoke the holy sarvice yourself.—We's plumb wedlocked, ain't we?

SAMP GREEN

[*Shrewdly dubious*]

Weddin' sarvice needs a witness, Claundesty.

[*Holding out the striped garments toward her, he waves them with a gesture of desperate ultimatum.*]

Jail gear!—I axes ye, pint blank: *Kin we chanct hit?*

[*Again, through the door crack, centre, appears the* STRANGER'S *face, grinning.*]

THE STRANGER

Shore!—*I*'s witnessed ye.—Chanct hit, fellers!

QUICK CURTAIN

TIMBER

Part I



PERSONS

CLABE VANOVER, *an old bee-man*
GRANNY MACNAB, *his sister*
NANCY, *her daughter-in-law*
TIMBER, *Nancy's son*
MARGIT, *his wife*
A VISITOR
Several mountain women

SCENE

Interior of Clabe's cabin in the Kentucky mountains at the present time.

TIMBER

PART I

A mountain cabin, sparsely furnished: a table, bed, several bench stools.

In the ingle of a great fireplace, burning low, CLABE VANOVER—*an old man, with long, unkempt hair, sits bent over a hollow gum-stump, whittling feebly at the inside.*

Near him, on the tumbled patchquilt of a rough bedstead, GRANNY MACNAB *lies dozing, propt by a feather bolster. Her face is weather-dark and wizzened under white straggling locks.*

In an open doorway, at back, MARGIT—*a girlish figure—stands leaning against the upright, her young lovely face gazing wistfully outdoors, where sounds of axe-strokes echo distantly.*

For a brief while no one speaks.

Then a far rushing murmur is followed by a rumbling crash, and the old woman starts up on the bolster, blinking.

GRANNY MACNAB

Eh! What were that? [*After a pause.*] Margit! What were that?

MARGIT

Hit were jist anither tree fallin'.

GRANNY

Oh—that, jist.

CLABE VANOVER

Yis; they never stops drumblin' that-a-way, like hit were the ole Deevil studyin' on the first fall.

[*Through a door, right,* NANCY *enters from another room. She is a sinewy, strong-featured woman, of middle age. She is knitting a little blanket of greyish wool, and crosses to the table.*]

NANCY

[*To Margit*]

Hain't he come home yit?

[MARGIT *shakes her head.* NANCY *sits, grimly.*]

I wisht my ears was stoppled with beeswax.

CLABE

[*Glancing up crypticly*]

The bees is quit makin' of their wax for humans.

NANCY

I wisht my mouth mahtn't never spit out the thoughts of a tree ag'in.

CLABE

The trees is quit drappin' their manna in the mouths of us'ns.

NANCY

[*Clicking her needles fiercely*]

Winter-in and spring-out, sun-up till day-set, fallin' and fallin' that-a-way, killin' off the last live man of us.

MARGIT

[*With a low cry*]

Don't!

CLABE

[*With a cautioning gesture toward* MARGIT]

Don't ye, Nancy!

NANCY

Well, Clabe Vanover, 'tain't *you* is a live man, air ye? Ye're jist old leavin's for the grave-acre—settin' thar, crookled up, iver sence the big popples was felled. But him, my man, Clyde, *he* war live and limber-steppin' as a stallion, to New Christmas time, and him stackin' bresh for the fire-coals, right thar in the ingle. Brashin' me with his big laugh he was: "Nancy," says he, "ye're gittin' too piert," he says; "I'll jist have to lay ye over my laig and whop ye."—Ah! And his both gret laigs mashed rid-bloody by the log-slide—and him now layin' his len'th in the blind ground with the ithers.

GRANNY

Yea, thin: sence I come in the world, hit's nine of the MacNab gineration is ben tooken by the timber: some in a jiffy, that-a-way, and some on 'em draggin' out the years—half-alivers, like Clabe thar—till they crackled. Clyde, my son, he were next to the onliest left.

NANCY

And the onliest left he's *my* son! Named him Timber I did for to take the old spell off. I sended for

the charm-doctor the day he were borned. He tuck the sprig of a witchhazel what he cut him in the dark o' the moon, and he jist tetched the babe with thet-thar sprig three times—skelp, loins and heel—and he christened him *Timber* thar in the Three Highest Names.

MARGIT

[*Who has drawn near, deeply interested*]

Oh!—christened him that-a-way?

NANCY

Yis. Ye see, that kindly blood-kinned him with the tree tribe. Hit tuck the spell offen him. So hinceforthly he cain't be hurted, nothin' in the world, by nary thing what's borned of the timber stock.

MARGIT

[*With quick intensity*]

How's that ye say? He cain't be hurted by nothin' made outen wood?

NANCY

Nary wooden thing cain't divvel him, no sirree! I looked sharp to that. So, Margit, you've wedded ye *one* MacNab what's insured for a lumberman.

MARGIT

[*With a flitting smile, turning again to the doorway*]

That's gret-big of a comfort, Maw-Nancy.

NANCY

[*Flaring, suddenly fretful*]

What-o'-Massy ain't he come home yit! Ben gone sence yisterdy, midnight, back in the mount'in!

MARGIT

Well, thanks be, us needsn't worry of hit now!

NANCY

And why needsn't we? Now's the thaw-time jist settin' in, and the dreens slushin' over the ice. Hit's the most slueyist, upsettindest, slobbindist turn o' the year, and him away-y-y up yander skid-drivin' four dumb mules on the aidge of etarnity—ha!

MARGIT

[*Amazed*]

But him charm-doctered—ye said hit jist now!

NANCY

[*Fiercely oblivious*]

Ha!

CLABE

[*To* MARGIT]

Never mind her, what-all she says. Hit 'tain't no charm-doctor kin turn the vingeance of the timber. Hits rootses goes down more deeper yit and grabbles the rock of the Word o' God hitself.

NANCY

Ah!—The ole gum-bee buzzin' ag'in!

CLABE

"Keep offen my timber," God he says to old Adam and Eva. "Yander Tree and hits fruitses is mine. Don't ye nivver despile hit!

"Beautiful on this airth hit is. Go your ways. Here and yan, back and forth, you kin squanter whar ye likes in the world, only mind ye this:—Don't nivver dar'st to spile my timber!"

[*Springing up,* NANCY *strides to the outer door, pushing* MARGIT *aside as she goes.*]

NANCY

Drippin' and meltin'!—Missed out twice of his breakfast, and now the dinner-pot coldin'. Him—my onliest what's left! [*Turning back, she looks tensely at* MARGIT.]—And God yit makin' more mothers! No, Margit, I won't knit no more wool for to wrop your babe what's comin'. Hit maht raise to be a *woman.* Finish the skein yourself!

[*She throws her knitting on the table, and hastens off, right.*]

MARGIT

[*Dazedly, sitting down on a bench*]

I don't clare understand hit all.

CLABE

Listen at me, then, leetle woman. I'll example hit to ye.

God sot his beautifulest Tree in the middist of his Bible gyardin. The timber of Knowledge hit were—knowledge of this-yer world in hits ontameless won-

ders: the pieded birds, and the slim proud beastes, and them singin' and roamin'; the wild bees workin' the flower-blooms; the sun-ball borndin' and dyin'; the moon glowwormin'; the hail-grit slashin'; the lightnin's slitterin' the dark, and the innumberless stars.

All the dreams of God hisself war ripin' in them-thar boughs.

"Never rob me of 'em," he says to man. "Them fruitses is mine. Let that they ripen and bear their seed. Despile not my timber, for hitself is my Sperrit; and them as worship Me shall worship me in my Sperrit."

But right thar the ole sarpent, Sattan, slid under the palin's. He larned man to despile the Sperrit of God, and man he fell and war damned.

—Margit, air ye listenin' of me?

MARGIT

[*Who has been gazing intently at the knitting wool*] Yis, Uncle Clabe.

CLABE

Now, then, yere's the pint of the example:

Man he were damned nigh on six thousand year. All the whiles he never got another chanct to repint till finaciously he come to Amerikee. Then God he turned him in his heart, and he says to man:

"Man, ye poor damned critter, I'll chanct ye onct more."

So God he onbarred his gyardin agin, and led man in, on up, and sot him down in the middist of the Kaintuck mount'ins. And ri'chere the same hit were

bloomin' still, His beautifulest timber: the timber of knowledge of his ontameless wonders.
Only here then the old first Tree had seeded herself new, and sprung up she had in thousands of mannyful green ginerations, tall and quiet as etarnity, talkin' to God high up—like the tall, still noise of geese at night, wedgin' the wind. [*To* GRANNY MACNAB, *who has half risen and is reaching unsteadily toward the chimney shelf:*] Eh, sis! What ye huntin'?

GRANNY

Retch me my pipe down,—and yan baccy twist.

CLABE

[*Handing her a clay pipe and tobacco*]

Feeblish, air ye?

GRANNY

I's out o' whack a leetle. I's jist smoke up a grain.

[*Sitting on the edge of the bed, she crumbles a piece of twist, fills and lights her pipe, and smokes drowsily as she listens to* CLABE. *Meantime* MARGIT *has picked up the wool and begun to knit at the little blanket.*]

CLABE

Heern what I said, did ye, Margit?

MARGIT

[*Dreamily*]

Do ye guiss he'll git home for supper?

CLABE

Eh, supper—who?

MARGIT

My man, Timber. He's two nights in the mount'in.

CLABE

What, now! Ain't ye listenin' me examplin' ye?

MARGIT

Yis, Uncle; shore I's listenin'.

CLABE

I were jist tellin' of these-yere mount'ins.
Well, Godamighty he says then: "Man, old Adam, here ye be. You're back ag'in. Here we sot frien'ly togither. Look sharp, this time!
"Mind what you're here for. You're here for to talk with me, under my timber. You're here for to commune with my Sperrit, not to despile hit. You're here for to shape your dreams to the likes of mine, and and mine are revealed in this-yere mountainy world ondespiled.—Amerikee: yere's my new gyardin of nature. Take what ye needs. Holp yerself.
"Build ye a new world here, but build hit accordin' to my beauty. Ilsewise I'll distroy ye ag'in—for a corruptin' canker-worm and no kin o' mine!
"But bless ye, good feller," he says, "I'm pinnin' my faith to ye—for a fresh start. So chirk up now, New Adam!" Godamighty he says. And he give man a roustin' frien'ly clap on the britch.
"Hark around ye!" he says: "The leetle angels of

etarnity is all calamberin' about us, singin' and singin'."

And God he laughed out-aloud, like a wrenny-bird.

MARGIT

[*Glancing up from her knitting*]

Kin God laugh, Uncle Clabe?

CLABE

O' course he kin; ilsewise he wouldn't be human.

MARGIT

And is God hisself human, Uncle?

CLABE

That's what-all *he* keeps wonderin', I rickon, when he conseeders some folks in Amerikee. But I must git on with my examplin' for ye.

Now, the tree God war settin' under, when he laughed that-a-way, were a popple—what they calls tulip or saddleleaf; gret-thunderin'-biggest, tall-white-graindest timber on the airth. *Hit* were the ginuine stock of the old Tree o' Ginisis, dírect discended down onchanged to the days of your Uncle Clabe and your Granny what's smokin' thar.

—Heigh, Sis? Do ye mind the tulip-popples in bloom, whin us were childer?

GRANNY

Lor', yis, the popples!—Drifty like sap-sugar-frost on the mount'ins.

CLABE

Sweety to your nose a mile off, warn't they? And the bee-clouds mistin' their goldy green honey-blooms.

GRANNY

Lor', yis! One growed nigh over the cabin. Whin she flowered, ye'd plumb drap your thread in the midst of the spinnin', jist for to wonder up and wonder of her. Ye couldn't holp of hit. Ye'd sing right out, and she'd jine in with ye. Oftly I sung'd her a sperritual, and her aboomin' the choir noteses. Yea, us jist loved that popple in bee-workin' time.

CLABE

Eh, did we! The eyes of us would be starin' up to her giantness of beauty. Our ears they'd be dreamin' of a grand harmonium roarin' in heaven. And our noses would be suckin' in the rain-dewy drinch of her fragrancin'.

MARGIT

That were bound to be purty—sech a tree. I loves to smell fragrancin'.

CLABE

Yis, and yan fragrancin' war the daily bread of us. Staff o' life hit were to mount'ins of cabins. For the honey of hit were drippin' from thousands of bee-gums. Honey fatted the farms. Honey slickened the housewives, and borned 'em their childer. Honey richened the counties and 'lected the jedges. The bee-man he war a governor in the mount'ins.—Young Clabe Vanover he counted his bran-new

bee-gums by the hunderd. Clabe hisself war New Adam in Eden gyardin, but onlonesome. Rich kin and neebors he had, and all honey-raised. Our bee-gums feeded our folkses, and God's white popples feeded the bees.—Yea, Margit: White Popple she were Queen of Amerikee, whin me and your Granny us were your age. Then lo and beholt—the gret fall!

MARGIT

What fall, Uncle?

CLABE

The second.

MARGIT

How behappened hit?

CLABE

Evenly the likes of the fust.—
White popple! The true, gret-beautiest tree o' Paradise: God give hit to us'ns in Amerikee. And what did us done with hit?
Build us an Ark for to worship the image of His Sperrit? Nay, sirree, Margit! Us robbed and despiled hit—for the second time.
The old Sarpent slid under the palin's ag'in.
Fur-down in the lowlands he stuck up his haid, and opened his pizen mouth—with the teeth of a saw-mill. Swarpin' his rattles he were. Belchin' of his belly-soot. Burrin' and singin' he retchit his slim, long neck toward the mount'in popples, whar us'ns war clettered like silly hummin'-birds. Gold-swolley he spet out his pizen spell, awitchin' us towards him, till soon he

had our haids twirlin' in circles—and we run 'em plumb in his mouth. Down yander us were soon in his guts.

MARGIT

[*With a quick shudder*]

Oh, Uncle Clabe! I don't cotch on what you's meanin'.

CLABE

Hit's a parable, Margit. Yan sarpent he were jist old Sattan in the shape of a lumber contractor. Divviled us he did with a rattlin' long yarn of gold fortunes. Pay us for a hunderd thousand popples he offered, fifty cints the tree log, delivered to the lowland sawmills.

Delivered— Yis, to the Deevil hisself!

Fell the timber ourselves we must; build us splash-dams to float the logs down. And when all hit were did and done, and Eden gyardin despiled, and halft the timber lostid or smashed in passage, and t'ither halft slattered by the saw-mill teeth: then ary of us mought whistle "Fifty cints!" to the mount'in winds, and God mought thunder for the Second Fall, and grind his heel on Amerikee for a world of crawlin' canker-worms.

GRANNY

Eh, Godamassy!

MARGIT

And warn't nothin' left to quittance ye for the purty popples?

CLABE

Quittance? Yea, and to spare! Look ayander outside.

Nigh the door-stone ye'll see the tops of a gret stump rottin'. Wide hit is for the Deevil to fiddle-dance an eight-handed reel thar. That onct war a white popple.

And here in the ingle ye'll see an old lousy man, keelin' the rot of a holler gum. This-here onct was a bee-man.

And out yander, acrosst the crick bottom, ye'll see fifteen white rocks in a nittle patch: but ye'll not see nary the nine men MacNabs, nor the six Vanovers, what lays arottin' below thar.

Quittance! Yea, the Lord He shore give us our rot-eated quittance.

[*Distantly* A CONFUSED NOISE *begins, and grows louder.*]

MARGIT

Listen, Uncle Clabe!

GRANNY

What were that ag'in?

[*A pause.*]

CLABE

Hit weren't no tree fallin'.

[*Pause.*]

MARGIT

Hear hit now?

CLABE

Yis: a quar rairin'.

[*Pause.*]

MARGIT

[*Starting up*]

Scritchin', seems like.—Hain't somebody callin'?

GRANNY

Who-all? Whar?

CLABE

[*Rises, moving lamely*]

'Tain't rain-thunder.—Could hit—?

MARGIT

God-awful a noise—!

NANCY

[*Rushing in from the right, screams past her towards outdoors*]

Slidin'! Hit's slidin'—the snow-thaw!

MARGIT

Ha! There's mule-bells. Hit's him!

NANCY

Timber—I told ye—skiddin' etarnity— He's agoner—

MARGIT

[*Crying out shrilly*]

Timber! Timber!

[*They both rush outdoors, disappearing to the right. The strange roar increases louder with jangling of*

bells, then subsides as suddenly, followed by a diminishing clamor of distant voices.]

GRANNY

[*Tottering up, drops her pipe—breaking it—on the hearth*]

Clabe!

CLABE

[*Gripping her arm, speaks slowly*]

The snow slide. Don't teeter, woman.

GRANNY

[*Bewildered*]

Busted hit is.

CLABE

Yis—busted.

GRANNY

My pipe. Hit's plumb out.

CLABE

Yis—plumb out.

GRANNY

[*Feebly peevish, trying to stoop*]

Retch hit back, cain't ye?

CLABE

No. Let hit lay.

GRANNY

What's behapp'nin'? Who's out thar?

CLABE

Sattan.

GRANNY

[*Dazedly*]

Is he comin' in here?

CLABE

Yis.

GRANNY

Visitin' here?

CLABE

Yis; evenly to the third and fourth gineration.

[*Lifting the knitted wool from the table, he drops it again.*]

GRANNY

Clabe!—The floor—hit's gittin' slanty. Holp me to the quilt.

[*Where she sways* CLABE *helps her to the bed, lifting her legs upon it. There she lies back dozing on the bolster.*
Seeing her quietly bestowed, CLABE *himself slowly sits again. Reaching for the pieces of broken pipe, he fingers them, putting them together, then apart, muttering aloud.*]

CLABE

Plumb out—made o' clay, jist—busted—

[*Outside the murmur still sounds.*
With his foot CLABE *scrapes up on the hearth a small heap of ashes, lays the broken pipe pieces upon it, covers them with more ashes and tamps all down on*

the top.—Then he sits very still, with hands folded, staring at the door muttering:]

White popples.—The popples begun hit.

[*Soon his eye-lids fall.*

Then, where he has been staring, in the doorway an odd FIGURE *appears:* A SHORT MAN, *in long purple-plaided ulster with deep fur collar, wearing prodigious, curved, yellow* GOGGLES *and a plaid travelling cap, moves on to the sill and peers in. He knocks lightly.*

At the sound CLABE'S *eyes open again and distend widely as he fixes them on the man, who returns the gaze with his goggles.*

Neither moves. Each is visibly aware of the other.

After a moment, the VISITOR *moves his lips, hesitant, and is just about to speak, when* CLABE—*sitting rigid —murmurs again:*]

White popples begun hit.

THE VISITOR

[*Faintly*]

Oh!—

[*He still gazes till* CLABE'S *eye-lids fall again.*

Then he moves off, disappearing noiselessly, toward the left.

Lifting once more, CLABE'S *eyes take on a startled fearfulness. He rubs them with his knuckles, and looks again at the door.*

Slowly then he rises, reaches backward for a poke-stick near him, and limps with it cautiously to the sill. There he looks off in both directions; stoops over, staring on the ground and floor.—Soon he calls low toward the bed:]

Sis! Did ye seen hit slippin' by?—Ef thot-thar were the same old Sarpent, he wored frog's eyes in his haid.

[GRANNY MACNAB *remains dozing.*
Coming to the bedside, CLABE *watches her a moment. Then, as she mutters in her sleep, tucking the quilt about her, he draws a tattered bedcurtain, shutting her from sight.*] Dreamin' she is. I reckon I were nap-dreamin' too. [*He sits again in the ingle.*]

Suddenly outside, from the left, three WOMEN *dash past the open door, where one of them turns back and yells in:*]

THE WOMAN

Nancy!—Margit!

THE VOICE OF ANOTHER

Come on! Likely they's gone ahead.

A THIRD

Upsided to splinders— Look a-thar!

THE FIRST

[*Hastening along*]

Is they over the splash-dam?

[*Their voices merge in a growing hubbub.*
Presently CLABE *rises, restive, and is starting for the door, when* MARGIT *appears there, panting for breath. Rushing in, she catches up the wool knitting from the table and dandles it about in a wild dance, laughing and sobbing aloud.*

Then flinging herself on her knees, she kisses it passionately.
All this CLABE *watches in astounded anxiety, trying to calm her actions with futile gestures, as he speaks to her tenderly.*]

CLABE

Margit! Margit, gal! Quit up. Air ye goin' franzy? Never don't take on that-a-way. Hit were bound to behappen. Quit cryin' of hit.—Don't ye now! Don't ye!

MARGIT

[*Clasping the little blanket, gazes up in a sudden burst of prayer*]

Godamighty! Godamighty! Let that hit be a man chile—like him.

CLABE

[*Hovering behind her*]

Poor leetle un!

MARGIT

Let that I can name hit *Timber*—like him.

CLABE

Ay, God!

MARGIT

Let that I git to charm-cure *mine* the day of hits borndin'—like Maw-Nancy done *hern!* Yea, let that mine and hisn mought grow to bloom gloryful—like *him,* my man! Dear Godamighty, amen!

CLABE

[*Lifting her to her feet*]

Leetle Margit!

MARGIT

[*Hugging him, tearfully*]

Oh, Uncle Clabe!

CLABE

Why-fur ain't ye yander, gal?

MARGIT

They's too minny thar. I couldn't stand to push in with them-all. I couldn't come clost to him now—yit. I wanted—this, along of me. [*She presses the knitting to her breast.*]

CLABE

Yis, yis.

MARGIT

And me and him here—jist to home.

CLABE

Yis, shorely. Did ye sight of him thar?

MARGIT

Jist only I glimpsid his face.

CLABE

Whar did ye leave him?

MARGIT

They's bringin' him here—Maw-Nancy and the ithers.

CLABE

What ithers?

MARGIT

Women folkses—the neebors.

CLABE

Allers the women—to sich times: nothin' but women!

MARGIT

There's *you* here, Uncle Clabe. That's one man.

CLABE

Dead-aliver is worser than the dead.

MARGIT

[*Drawing back*]

Hark! They's bringin' him now.

CLABE

Sech rackittin'! Does they think hit's the Jedgment risin'?

MARGIT

[*Gazing at the door*]

O my man!

[*At the doorway there is a swift commotion of crowding women; then a sudden lulling of their voices, as a great tawny* FIGURE *looms in their midst, strides in slush-bespattered, and flings off his fur cap with a loud laughing halloo of eagerness.*]

THE FIGURE

Ho thar, Margit!

MARGIT

[*Darting to his arms*]

Timber!

CLABE

[*Starting back, aghast.*]

Lor' be!—Jedgment has riz him!

NANCY

[*Pushing in, with fierce triumph*]

Charm-curin' has riz him afore Jedgment! Hit's me, his Maw, what kin blast the trump for Gabriel.

TIMBER

Ye shore kin, Maw. I had God agrabblin' one shin o' me, and Old Horny the t'other. But I skun loost of 'em both, thanks be to my christ'nin'! and, Margit,—here I's home to ye.

MARGIT

[*Glowing to his glad gaze at her*]

O Timber!

CLABE

[*Confounded*]

Hisself astandin' thar!

[*He drops into his ingle-chair, as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

TIMBER

Part II

PART II

The rise of the curtain discovers exactly the same scene, except that now CLABE *is leaning forward in his ingle-chair, watching where* TIMBER—*by the table,* MARGIT *beside him—is eagerly beset by a group of Mountain Women, whom he good-naturedly waves off, escaping from them by scrambling on top of the table.*

TIMBER

Give me wind, gals!

THE WOMEN

[*Severally*]

How come hit to ye, Timber?
Whar was ye when she caved?
How-all behappened hit?
Man alive, give us the tidin's!

TIMBER

Hold a piece! I were tellin' of ye.—
Hit were last lap o' the mount'in. Skiddin' hit down Goose Branch I was—double team, head on, licketty-splittin' for Bee Rock Ford, jist asluein' the turn whar the snow-tide were spumin' and bellerin' like a kick-wrastle of wild deevils in the waller:—heigh, Jerushy, what a slush-jamble! Them mules! Co-oop!
Me atops of the log-mount, decked away-y-y up yander

twelve foot from the runners, ayellin' thunder-blazes! And my both feet cork-grippin' the ice of thet-thar ridge-pin, for to back-slant my spine, pull-haulin' and yankin' them tumblin'-to-hell-and-all mule-brutes.—Co-oop, thar! That were a minute!

MARGIT

A terriblest awful!—Oh!

NANCY

What behappened ye?

A WOMAN

What become to ye nixt?

TIMBER

[*Slipping down and half sitting on the table-edge*]

Ha, fellers! Did ary of ye iver foller day-dreamin'? Did ary of ye pick an eye-wink for to dream a fool dream the len'th of a lazin' summer's day—and you jist totter-teeterin' on the aidge of the icy Jordan? Well, fellers, *I* done hit right thar. I dreampted me a dream, that eye-wink, co-oopin' them mules.

MARGIT

Dreamin' sech a minute! O man, how could ye to dream?

TIMBER

So holp me Granny, I cain't tell ye.

MARGIT

What likes of a dream were hit?

TIMBER

Stillsome and glad and easy as noonin' hour in a holly kivver. And hit were mostly all about *you,* Margit.

MARGIT

No-o! Ye're jist turnin' hit on me.

TIMBER

Whole soul, live or die, I hain't!
I dreampted hit were time of mid-bloom. Bees was horndin' around. I were jest quit swampin' a log-trail. I war settin' under a big white popple, spittin' terbacca.

CLABE

[*Craning forward*]

White popple!

TIMBER

The jay-birds was hollerin' fur-off: "Caloomer! Caloomer!" You was akneelin' clost by, Margit. Grubbin' of a green bank you was, baskettin' sang roots.

MARGIT

Yea, I loves sangin', whin hit's bloom time.

TIMBER

Shore, leetle woman, hit war bloom time for you in yan dream. Purty you was as a rosy bush. A warble-bird were hittin' hit up sweetful in the popple leaves right over ye, but you was asingin' right smart sweet-fuler below him.

MARGIT

What of were I singin'?

TIMBER

A lonesome tune you were singin' of: *The Little Mohee.*—

[*Starting to sing it*]

"When I was awanderin' for pleasure one day—"

MARGIT

[*Taking it up*]

"In to a new country my ship sailed that way."

TIMBER

[*Singing on*]

"When I was alanded I sot down on the grass
And whom did I spy but an Indian lass.—"

Ha, Margit! Gin I heerd ye tunin' that up, I war jist slippin' over the grass to sot down by ye, when plumb betwixt us thar drapped outen the tree boughs a leetle quar two-legged angel feller, and him wingless.

MARGIT

An angel feller!

NANCY

A franzy dream ye had! Ye're pullin' wool over us.

TIMBER

'Clare to Peter I hain't! He were one o' these-yere Bible cherubins. Pieded he was as a wild turkey rooster, and preened hisself slick and chesty, toe-steppin' like a bantam. And clippit round his forehead he wored big, roundy, yaller goggle-eyes.

CLABE

[*Starting up*]

Ha!—What?

TIMBER

Which he looked at both us'ns, moughty frien'ly, and bowed his top-knot.

[*At this moment in the doorway, unnoticed by the intent listeners, reappears the plaided* VISITOR *and peers in, through big* GOGGLES, *under his cap rim.*]

CLABE

[*Limping forward a step toward* TIMBER]

Yaller goggle eyes, ye said?

TIMBER

Yis, bulby, the likes of onion skins.

CLABE

[*Catching sight of the* VISITOR *at the door*]

Godamighty!

[*He steps back, gripping his chair arms.*]

TIMBER

Ailin', air ye, Uncle?

[*The* VISITOR *disappears.*]

CLABE

[*Feebly*]

No, son. Nap-dreamin', I rickon,—like you.

[*He sits down.*]

TIMBER

So this-yer tree-drapper he peeps up and says: "Partners," he says, "ef be you's wanderin' for pleasure, I can show ye in to a new country myself, and my ship she's jist tank-filled to sail away thar."
So, then, seemed like we was all three stan'in' on a bare, big popple stump, and up come chug-chuggin' one o' these down-yander autymobiles; and in we clumb—you, Margit, up front by the cherub-angel steerin' the wheel—and, Jiminy flinders! we was off.

CLABE

Old Sattan shore got ye in his divvil-waggon.

TIMBER

Well, sir, I never 'magined that gas-buggy would hold her mount 'gin the wind. *Squonk! squonk!* she whistled like a witch-goose, lettin' out a stink-smoke ten miles behind her. Zipp-under the world wint. But yan leetle cherubin he jist sot tight on her neck, steerin' quiet, puffin' a seégar twist. Till by and yan hit come dark.

"Where ye steerin' of us?" I hollered.
"I'm landin' ye to Paradise Park," he says. "Looka-there!"
And right thar hit retched afore us, shinin' wonderfulest. Plumb full of millions o' pieded stars hit were. Dizzle-dawzzle they was winkin', flarin' out and in, see-sawin' down and up, apickin' out blazin' letter-words a horse high; bloomin' of rainbow flowers and waterfalls and rid comets chasin' their blue tails. And all the whiles they was rairin' out a razzlin' scritch-music, same as these-yer phonygraphs keeps acoughin' outen their windpipes.

NANCY

I guiss dreamin' you was of yan visit ye made down to Mimphis.

TIMBER

Nay, hit were more hivven than Mimphis.
Right down we landed in the middist of the rinktums. And thar was retchin' high up a thunderin' high wall, lacey with light-jewels, bucklin' and sparkin' like fire-coals. Hit were moughty the likes of a mud-gum, with men, stid o' bees, workin' the holes of hit. Painted hit were—black and rid-scarlet, all over—with Mother Evas, withouten nary a fig-britch.
"Come on in!" says the angel feller.
"What-all is hit?" I axed him.
"Hit's Eden Timple," he says; and in he tuck us.

MARGIT

Lordygoodness!

TIMBER

Well, sir, thar us were in a whale of a cellar-hole, hog-darkish, jamble-full of other folkses settin' starey-eyed.

Here come over our heads a kindly of a bluish cloud fog, which hit streaked to the furder end and showed all creation amovin' thar:—Men-humans and brutes, they was: cats, women and dogs, horses and mount'ins and soldiers marchin'; ships sailin' big as a hill; a leetle múst ache man leggin' hit toed-out fit to kill ye; kittens playin'; train éngines bustin'; and fellers tumblin' over clifts after gals—ary spectácle on airth, I's tellin' ye, for to example creation, and they-all movin' like hell was after 'em, but yit all was dumb as ghost-hants.

NANCY

Hit 'ud likely be one o' them pictur movies.—I's heern tell of 'em.

MARGIT

[*Absorbed*]

Did us stay thar long?

TIMBER

Us stayed thar jaw-gapin' till the cherubin he tipped to my elbow and says: "Come on, now," he says, "to the upstairs Timple."

So in we steps to a mineshaft truck, and up she lick-ets half a mile and shoots us out in a blazin', blarin' randybooze.

"What's this-yere?" I axes him ag'in.

"Hit's Paradise Roof-Gyardin," he says. "Jine in!" Well, right thar, Margit, you was stumped.

The hivven-made music was jazz-razzlin' hit, and thar wint the Injun-painted Evas and Adamses clinch-steppin' in pairs, swarmin' and scuttin' thick as chinch-bugs on a sick-abed preacher.

"Won't ye dance, lady?" says the angel feller, nosin' at *you* like a razor-back.

"Yis—she *won't!*" I says.

And jist I were liftin' up for to lamm his snout, whin I heerd a roarin' like as Jedgment was under me, and

"Co-oop!" I hollered, "Co-oop, ye hell-damn mule brutes!"

And I seed their tails thrashin' ice in the tide of Bee Rock Ford, and *whang!* come a wallopin' water-spit acrosst the log-boom, which hit sting-blinded me.

MARGIT

'Clare to caution! And you jist wokened from that dream!

NANCY

And hit-all behappened in one eye-wink?

TIMBER

Like a scratch o' lightnin'.

MARGIT

But how-all did ye stiddy the ford, and hit swole that fearsome?

TIMBER

Axe Godamighty, Margit. I disremember—only jist

a black, cold-blasted blether of cussin' mule brutes. Fear o' God and cuss-wordin' wallered us over.
But the ford warn't nothin' to the slash trail beyand hit. Thar begun the endin'.
Tilt-slanted she war like a roofslide, and dreenin' with slush belly-deep in the stump-drifts. I were aimin' to steer the skids crisscrosswise.—On we come, kick-tearin'.
I slued the mules onct.—*Co-oop!*
Twice I done hit.—*Co-oop!*
Then I heerd God hollerin' *Whoa!* Third time,—thar she split!
The mount'in drapped a shingle—and us on hit. Hell-drivin' we was, but the hull world was drivin' to hell along of us.
I were balancint' on the ridge-log. I were studyin' to jump.—*Bing!* she loost—the toggle chain. Thar goes teekle-block after her! *Rip-tangle-jangle*—them mule bells! Whee! Hoofs over ears—logs flyin' like a wild-goose wedge—snow bustin'—rocks rainin' thunder and splinders—bog slush—mules belly-up! And me at the plunk o' the mount'in, settin' up thar piert on the splash-dam,—charm-doctered sence I were borned!

[MARGIT *covers her eyes, quivering. He laughs, hugging her shoulder.*]

A WOMAN

[*breathlessly*]

Charm-doctered?

ANOTHER

What-all salvationed ye that-a-way?

TIMBER

[*Taking from his breech-pocket a tiny stick of wood*]

That done hit.

THE SECOND WOMAN

That!

TIMBER

This-yere witch-wood.

THE FIRST WOMAN

[*Examining it with the others*]

What mought that be?

TIMBER

Hit's a sprig o' the hazel switch what Maw had the ole witch-doctor to whop me three clips in the Three Highest Names—and me jist lamb-blawtin' from the womb.

NANCY

[*Proudly*]

Hit's a wise ewe-sheep what knows witch-hazel from lambkill, and her raisin' a right smart ram-critter.

TIMBER

[*Laughing with the women*]

Haw! Hain't she proudy of her ram now! Watch

out, gals. I ain't tethered. I mought horn-buck ye. *Blaaa!* [*He makes a prancing jump at them as they scatter screaming at his bleat.*]
Spring along home now to your own palin's, afore Maw-Nancy gits me vainglorifyin' right smarterer. Elsewise I maht done leave ye the likes what *William* done *Pretty Polly.*

ONE OF THE WOMEN

How did he done to her?

TIMBER

[*Singing dolefully*]

"He left nothin' but small birds
To make their sad mourn!"

[*As the women go out titter-laughing, several exclaim, or call back, as they go.*]

THE WOMEN

[*Severally*]

Lor' suz!
He outcutes a holy-roller.
Hain't he the sparkindest?
Him in a kick-dance—golly!
When'll you git to be comin' to claim your mule brutes, heigh, Timber?

TIMBER

When I gits to haulin' logs t'other side o' Jordan, Marthy Ann.—Them mules is haulin' wives for Solomon now.

MARTHY ANN

Rope him up, Margit! You'll be raisin' him young hellyons yit.

[*The* WOMEN *disappear outside.*]

TIMBER

[*Kissing* MARGIT]

I's be thankin' God for whativer a sprig ye'll be raisin' to me, sugar.

MARGIT

So be hit favors *you,* I's be thankin' Him the same, ye hazelwood boy. [*Showing him the nearly finished little blanket.*] Look what Maw-Nancy's knittin' for hit, when hit's ourn. [*With a persuasive smile.*] Ain't ye, Maw?

NANCY

[*With a quick shrug, non-committally*]

Mebbe I is, when I ain't more better-busieder tendin' to *mine,* which he's now jist back from etarnity with a holler belly.—Air ye hongry, Timber?

TIMBER

Hongry as a ditch wolf.

NANCY

[*Bustling*]

Clabe! holp me git the dinner stirrin'. Stump in thar. [*To* TIMBER.] Boy, I'll git hit hotted for ye in two shakes of a lamb's tail.—Fotch along the poke-stick, Clabe. [*She hurries off, right.*]

[*Starting to limp after her from his ingle* CLABE *stops near the door and speaks back, slowly.*]

CLABE

Timber! Old Sattan mislicked ye this time, and I's God-thankful for ye. But be wareful, boy. Don't ye put no stock in witchery; put hit in the Bible. The Bible knows what busted your log-skid this day.

TIMBER

I knows hit, too, Uncle Clabe. I boomed her with a dogwood saplin.' I knewed at the time that would bad-luck me with the logs, but there warn't nothin' better to hand.—The dogwood done hit.

CLABE

No-o, Timber. The dogwood didn't done hit. What *did* done hit—you was setting right under her in your dream. Yan angel feller drapped outen her boughs thar. *The white popple* done hit—*and she'll git to do more yit!*

[*He turns and limps slowly off.*]

[TIMBER'S *eyes follow him, his face clouding with perplexity.* MARGIT *watches* TIMBER *anxiously, from a bench where she is sitting.*]

TIMBER

White popple?—*Shore* he drapped down thar!—What-all is old Uncle gittin' me snagged with the Bible and white popple!

MARGIT

He turned hit on that afore. He says how hit's the second fall.

TIMBER

Fall? What a kind of a fall?

[*He sits down near* MARGIT.]

MARGIT

The fall o' man and Amerikee. He says how white popple were God's beautiest tree in the Bible gyardin. And she seeded us our mount'ins with his holy timber, which hit blissed us with honey and staff o' life and the fragrancin' of God's Sperrit. But us despiled hit for the old Sarpent—him timptin' us of a gret fortune.

TIMBER

How gret of a fortune?

MARGIT

I fergit, jist. I warn't heedin' him clost. [*With a quick smile.*]—I war knittin' of this, ye see.

TIMBER

[*Catching her glance, fondly*]

Oh, the knittin'!

MARGIT

But I thinks I heerd him say summat about fifty cints.

TIMBER

[*Jumping*]

Fifty cints!—Poor ole bee feller! He's gittin'

nutty as a chinkapin. That sittles hit. The Bible kin wait. I'll resk my chanct on witchery.

MARGIT

Yis; he's gittin' moughty old-timish, Uncle Clabe. Us is up-and-comin'der—leastways *you* is, Timber. You ben down to Mimphis, hain't ye?

TIMBER

Yea, onct.

MARGIT

[*Beginning to knit*]

Is they minny fellers thar?

TIMBER

Milyins!

MARGIT

Do ye know ary?

TIMBER

Yis, one—right smart a bit.

MARGIT

Is they—is they minny gals down to Mimphis?

TIMBER

So holp me Granny! Didn't I told ye my dream?

MARGIT

Shore, Timber, ye did. Was *hit* thar—Paradise Park?

TIMBER

Was hit *whar?*

MARGIT

[*Glancing up*]

In Mimphis.

TIMBER

Say, Margit! What blackbird hev you ben larnin' for to tattle "*Mimphis*" to ye?

MARGIT

Oh, a leetle bird—in the bosom of me. I thought mebbe, ef he tattled up to ye right smart enough, he maht git ye for to take me thar along of you.

TIMBER

I'd wring his little neck fust!

MARGIT

[*Starting at his vehemence*]

Timber!

TIMBER

Take *you* thar?—Not by a long shot in hell!

MARGIT

Ain't ye nivver goin' back thar?

TIMBER

Oh,—me. [*Rising.*]—How long hev ye wored that dress ye've got on?

MARGIT

[*Knitting again*]

So mebbe ye *mought* be goin' back!

TIMBER

Mought be I would. [*A pause.*] Cain't tell what mought be takin' me thar—*some* time.

MARGIT

What like would hit be—takin' ye?

TIMBER

O-oh,—business, mebbe.

[*A pause.*]

MARGIT

Who with?

TIMBER

Some feller thar, likely.

MARGIT

That one feller ye knowed—right smart a bit?

TIMBER

Maht happen hit's him.

[*A pause.*]

MARGIT

Whin?

TIMBER

No time. Most inny time.

MARGIT

[*Stops knitting*]

—To-day?

[*A pause.*]

TIMBER

Not as I knows. [*A longer pause.*] Mebbe I maht fotch ye home a new dress.

MARGIT

[*Knitting very fast*]

How long hev you follered dancin', Timber?

TIMBER

[*Watching her intently*]

Iver sence I were chunk of a kid.

MARGIT

Clinch dancin', I's talkin' of.

TIMBER

What-like of is that?

MARGIT

Like what us seed in yan Paradise Roof Gyardin—me and you—*in that dream o' yourn!*

TIMBER

[*Sitting down by her*]

Say,—God, Margit! Quit up knittin', will ye? Ye've got my head plumb swivelled watchin' of ye—you hurrycanin' that-a-way.

MARGIT

[*Stops knitting*]

I drapped a stitch back yander a piece. So I hasted

up a spell. Thought I'd like to finish hit done—afore you wint back to Mimphis.

TIMBER

[*Bursting out*]

Drap hit—Mimphis! Drap hit for hell and all! Who said I were goin' thar? [*After a still, tense pause, he speaks tenderly.*] Ri'chere to Bee Rock Branch hit's to home for us'ns, ain't hit, gal? Ri'chere I guiss us kin make us a crap togither.—Won't us?

[*At his tender appeal,* MARGIT *suddenly puts her head on his breast, sobbing passionately.*]

MARGIT

Yis, yis, yis! O Timber, yis!

TIMBER

Thar, thar! What's broke loost? And you ain't *cryin'?*

MARGIT

Yis, yis—

TIMBER

What-fur why? Thar, thar! Cryin' of *me,* jist hell-cussin'?

MARGIT

Yis—yis—yis,—hit's to home ri'chere!

TIMBER

[*Caressing her*]

Shore hit's to home ri'chere, whar us'ns be. Couldn't

hardly seem natural, and me not cuss-wordin', could hit now?

MARGIT

No-o, no-o! Ah-ha, hold me closter!

TIMBER

So! More closterer yit?

MARGIT

[*Gasping in his arms*]

—Loosterer—

TIMBER

[*Releasing her*]

So, I guiss! And you, cryin' for me not crosstin' over Jordan with them mules!

MARGIT

[*Clutching him again*]

No-o, Timber! Don't ye nivver try fordin' over nowhars ag'in, without me along of ye.

TIMBER

With you along, heigh? How-all?—Me swimmin' to Jedgment, and you piggyback?

MARGIT

Innyhows—innywheres—jist only me along of you, boy! Ye promises me that! Ye promises me?

TIMBER

[*Smacking her lips*]

Thar, sugar! Ye're damn sweet. That swear-binds hit.—And look a-here! [*Holding up the knitting.*] Is hit this-yere you's hastin' to finish hit so fast, expectin' for the rightly owner to claim hit?

MARGIT

[*Half laughing*]

Don't fool-tease me! Put hit down, Timber!

TIMBER

Is *that* hits name? And expectin' a namesake of *me* for to measure *that* len'th?
[*Stretching out the tiny blanket, he hails* NANCY, *as she just enters carrying a big, wooden trencher.*]
Heigh thar, Maw-Nancy! Is that-thar the cradle you's bringin'? Is *hit* in thar wood or popple?

NANCY

What ye gabbin' about?

TIMBER

The leetle chip o' the home *timber*— Is hit hazel-wood, or popple?

NANCY

How do I know what wood hit is! Hit's a piggin, and hit now holdin' the hot vittals for ye.—Pitch in, now! Fill up your holler.
[*She sets the dish on the table before* TIMBER, *handing him spoon and knife.*]

Margit, run git the coffee-pot. Slide your underpinnin'—quick!

[*To her peremptory gesture* MARGIT *hurries off, right. At the dish* TIMBER *falls to, voraciously,* NANCY *beaming on him.*]

Ye poor dadburned leetle ditch-wolf, missin' out two days of your Maw to feed ye! Hongry, is ye? That's right. Aim your nuzzle right in and shoot. Knock every adult out of hit. Lor' be! Hit likes me wonderful on earth jist to stand here watchin' you pitchin' of hit that-a-way—and you ri'chere to home ag'in.

TIMBER

[*Grinning, with his mouth full*]

Here I be, Maw.

NANCY

And here's the onliest place what's to home on the wanderin' face o' the world, ain't hit—ri'chere with your Maw?

TIMBER

Ri'chere—to the fodder trough.

NANCY

And you won't never not go trackin' off reskin' your neck and life ag'in, withouten *me* along of ye; won't ye, Timber wolfy?

TIMBER

"*Me* along of ye!"—"*Me* along of ye!" Haw, haw! the dadgone old ewe-sheep: So now she aims she'll go wolf-trackin'!

NANCY

Quit slackjawin' me! Promise me you won't nivver git God to hollerin' *whoa* at ye ag'in—without *me* to safe-handle ye.

TIMBER

And hain't I safe, so fur, in the hands o' witchery?

NANCY

Yea, so fur is so fur. But onct too minny is twict too much. Give me your promise. Buss me your Bible oath now.

TIMBER

[*Lifts his face to hers, kissing her cheek*]

Thar, thin. That busses ye.

NANCY

[*Starting for the door, right*]

What keeps her lazin' with that coffee-pot?

[*She hurries off. Peering after her,* TIMBER *pulls out a pewter flask from his breeches and sings:*]

TIMBER

"I would like for the ole folks know
How I loves sugar in the coffee, O!"

Barley-corn sugar—that's the sorghum for this-yere child o' God.

[*He drinks deep from the flask, eats a bite more, and then sings:*]

"Come along, Sally Good'in,
I want a piece o' pie!
I want a piece o' puddin'
And I'll give hit all away to my little Sally Good'in."

NANCY

[*Sticks her head in the door*]

That ole fool Clabe Vanover drapped the coffee-pot and spillt hit. We'll git ye some more in a minute. Sing out, lad. I loves to hear ye hollerin' that homelike.

[*She disappears within.*]

[TIMBER, *who has stuck the flask behind the trencher, takes it up and drinks again, singing:*]

TIMBER

"Up the hill
And down the livvel
Granny's puppy
Treed the Divvel!"

[*Drinking, he spills the contents of the trencher in the fireplace. Then, after eyeing it tipsily a moment, he lays the wooden trencher across one knee, and chuckles:*]

Don't ye keer! Tune up, ole dulcimore!

[*Taking out his little hazel sprig, he begins to pick with it at the trencher, as if thrumming an instrument,*

while he taps one foot on the floor to the lilt of his voice.]

"Ole Dan Tucker he got drunk,
Fell in the fire and kicked up a chunk.
A rid-hot coal hopped in his shoe:
Good God, Jinny, how the ashes flew!

"I wint to the river and couldn't git across.
I straddled a nigger what I thought he were a hoss.
I rid him in, and he couldn't swim.—
I'd of give five dollars for to ben back ag'in."

[*In the doorway appears the* VISITOR *with goggles. He stands watching* TIMBER, *without moving. Draining his flask,* TIMBER *drops the trencher and the hazel sprig, shoves back from the table and, picking up the knitting, begins aimlessly to unravel the wool, while he sings:*]

"A raccoon up the gum-stump,
A possum in the holler,
A purty gal at Daddy's house
As fat as she kin waller. . . .

"Jump up, Lucy, for the wind is aroarin,'
The geese is hollerin', the cocks they's crawin':
The girt is broke and the saddle is loost.
Ef I was to fall off—"

Whoa, thar!

[*He staggers to his feet, catching the skein on his chair-*

arm as he does so. Moving unsteadily on his feet, he keeps hold of the knitted blanket, which unravels a snarled thread of yarn behind and about him, as he waves the wool, singing louder:]

"I roll, I roll, all winter lost,
Adrankin' of strong wine,
Kissin' the lips of a Rid-Rosy-Cheeks
Has broken the heart of mine.—

"Who's goin' to shoe your little feet?
Who's goin' to glove your hand?
Who's goin' to kiss your rid rosy cheeks
When I'm in some far-off land?

"Oh, Poppie will shoe my little —"

[TIMBER *catches sight of the* VISITOR, *and stops suddenly.*]

God o' Goshen!

[*He stares for a moment, speechless.*
The VISITOR *beckons to him.*]

How-all did *you* git here?—in your gas-buggy? Ahead of your notch, hain't ye?

[*The* VISITOR *makes a gesture toward the inner room, and moves back outdoors.*]

Shore, they's in yander. They ain't seen ye.

[*The* OTHER *appears to whisper something.*]

What's that ye're ristlin' to me? [*Holding out his*

flask.] Shore, you kin have some.—No-o, ye cain't! She's impty. Never mind. [*Lurching to the door.*] The still's down the holler a piece. Us kin talk business thar.

[*Outside, the* VISITOR *speaks to him low. He stoops to listen, dropping the knitting wool.*]

Take ye thar? Shore I will. What? No-o! Got your flivver along? Hell! Driv her up this-yere braskwhack of a mud-trail? Whar is she—down yander? *Shore* I'll steer ye to the liquor. I'll drive your ole divvil-waggon myself. Say, brother! I dreampted me a dream. . . .

[*They disappear outdoors.*
After a moment, MARGIT *comes in with the coffee-pot.*]

MARGIT

Here it is. You poor outpatienced boy, was ye thinkin'—?

[*She stops, surprised.*
Looking about, she sets the pot on the table.
Then she stands anxiously still.
Suddenly, looking from floor to chair, she gives a low gasp.]

The wool yarn—O Jesus!

[*Twitching the snarled skein from the chair, she stoops for the yarn on the floor, following it—with feverish trepidation—to the doorway.*]

Ravellin's—jist ravellin's! —

[*Reaching down outside, she snatches up what remains of the little blanket, with a faint cry.*]
Ah, hitself! the wee little—jist a cornder of hit—Nothin' left but jist— O Jesus Lord!

[*She stands holding it blankly for a moment. Then, starting outdoors, she glances about, and disappears. The room is left empty. . . .*

After a little, MARGIT *reappears and comes slowly in again, closing the door, as she murmurs:*]

Timber — ! . . .

[*Holding the snarled wool in a loose roll, she fondles it, lifting it against her cheek strangely.*
As she stands there dreamstricken, NANCY *enters, and —catching her fearful look—stares at her.*]

NANCY

Quit! Quit curdlin' of me that-a-way! Ef you's seein' a hant, hit tain't me.

MARGIT

Whar is he—Timber?

NANCY

Stept out, likely. What ye cuddlin' to ye thar?

MARGIT

Jist—ravellin's.

NANCY

What!—Pulled out your stitches—and mine, too—snarlin' of hit! What the divvil did ye done that for?

MARGIT

I didn't done hit.

NANCY

Who did, then?

MARGIT

Yea, Maw-Nancy! *Who did, then?*

NANCY

Axin' ain't answerin', is hit? What's chatterin' ye that-a-way? Ye're shacklin' like a popple leaf, and rain comin'. Skeered, air ye, some wind'll strike ye?

MARGIT

Yis, Maw-Nancy: I's skeered hit'll strike me. I feels hit acomin'.

NANCY

Ye feels hit—the wind?—and the door shet!

MARGIT

Yis, a quar ristlin'—from yanside the mount'in.

NANCY

Ristlin' your Granny! [*Turning to the table.*] What the patience ain't he tuck his coffee yit? [*Discovering the fallen trencher, she snatches it up.*]—Look athar! And the piggin all spillt! Now the Deevil ketch him! I'll lay he's stept down to the still. I guissed he had two draps, him hollerin' *Dan Tucker.*

[*Sitting on a bench,* MARGIT *reaches beside her to pick up the hazel sprig, dropped there by* TIMBER.]

MARGIT

[*Looking at it intently*]

Is they witchery in the Bible, Maw-Nancy?

NANCY

Shore they is.

CLABE

[*Limping in the door, right*]

Shore they *hain't!*

NANCY

Oh, hain't they, Clabe Vanover! What about ole Saul runnin' that Endor woman for a witch docter?

CLABE

The Bible hit gives her name. But hit don't give her no docterin' certificate. The Bible—

NANCY

[*Jumping at* MARGIT *with a cry, snatches the sprig from her*]

Ha! What ye doin' of that-thar? Where'd ye lay hands on't?

MARGIT

I picked hit up, on the tread-board.

NANCY

Ye lie! Hit's hisn. Hit's Timber's—the hazel-sprig. What-fur did ye stole hit from him?

MARGIT

Maw-Nancy!

NANCY

He keeps hit allers in his britch-poke. He maht be divilled and hit lostid away from him. Whar's he gone? Ain't he nivver comin' to the coffee-pot?

CLABE

[*From his ingle-chair*]

Woman, give ye remimber this: Witch-hazel cain't never stand agin white popple. This day mornin', white people busted the mount'in.— This day evenin' —hit'll bust more yit.

NANCY

Hold your mouth, old dead-and-alive!

CLABE

This time, hit's bringin' the third fall.

NANCY

Hold your mouth! I'll never listen at ye.

CLABE

Listen at God, then.—[*He makes an eerie gesture.*] Do ye hear hit, Margit?

MARGIT

Yis, I ben hearin' of hit.

NANCY

What?

[*She gapes at them, awed, where they sit listening.*]

CLABE

Hit's comin' clos't now.

[*A pause.*]

MARGIT

Hit's comin' closterer.

[*A pause.*]

NANCY

What-all do ye hear?

MARGIT

What-all do you hear, Uncle Clabe?

CLABE

Ristlin'.

MARGIT

[*Nodding her head*]

Ristlin'.

NANCY

Lor' be! Yea, ristlin'. I hears hit, too. Hit's nigh the door. Is that talkin'—somebody? O Lor', the hazel-sprig outen his britch, and the wool snarl-ravelled— Is that talkin', thar?

[*A light rap sounds on the door.*]

O Lor' Mighty!

[*All three remain still.*
Soon the door taps louder and begins to push open. They watch it, breathless.
It opens wide, revealing the backs of two WOMEN, *bent over.*

They bear in a burden, covered by a plaided robe and held at the foot by the VISITOR *in goggles.*
Suddenly at the sill he bows and disappears.
Panting, the WOMEN *lay down their load, partly uncovering a motionless body.*
With high, wailing scream, MARGIT *throws herself beside it.*

MARGIT

Ah-h-h!

[*The curtains of the bed push aside, and* GRANNY MACNAB *sticks her head out.*]

GRANNY

What were that, Clabe?

CLABE

[*With a silencing gesture*]

Sh-h-h!

GRANNY

Is he come yit?

CLABE

Still ye!

NANCY

[*Staring on the body*]

Timber!

ONE OF THE WOMEN

Hit sluiced in the mud.

THE OTHER

The autymobile.

THE FIRST

Hit turned over on him—upsydown.

THE SECOND WOMAN

Us fetched him here, with the goggle eyes feller. [*Looking round*]—Whar is he?

CLABE

[*Rising*]

Which feller?

THE FIRST WOMAN

From Paradise Park, he says. He's keeper thar.

THE SECOND

They was drivin' business togither, he says.—Whar is he?

NANCY

[*Looking fiercely at the body*]

Daid!

THE FIRST WOMAN

The autymobile— Hit mashed him—the iron exle—

NANCY

Yea, iron!— The timber wouldn't never tetch him! 'Twarn't *my* doin's. Lay hit back to him, Margit—the hazel-sprig.

[*She puts the twig of wood in* MARGIT'S *hand. At the touch of it* MARGIT *starts from her wild dumbness, and speaks to the body, low voiced, in a strange ecstasy.*]

MARGIT

Timber, listen at me! You war gloryful on the mount'in. You overcome hit in the middist of the snowslide. Yis, gloryful you was, settin' thar in your dream-beginnin'—and hit bloom time, and me grubbin' sang in the green bank, and us singing' *The Little Mohee.* The Mount'in timber never tuck ye from me; hit were Paradise Park what tuck ye. I knewed it. I knewed hit, and you endin' your dream.—Hit were Paradise Park!

But listen at me, hazelwood boy: Hit'll never tuck *him* what's acomin to us, the leetle chip of ye. I'll namesake him for ye—with this. Here hit is—the sprig what ye lostid. And Maw-Nancy and me, us'll christen him *Timber* in the Three Highest Names. —Won't us, Maw-Nancy?

NANCY

[*Grimly tender, kneeling by her*]

Yea, Margit,—and proudly.

[*She clutches* MARGIT *in her arms.*]

GRANNY MACNAB

[*From the ingle*]

Clabe! Did he come yit, visitin'?

CLABE

Yis.

GRANNY

Is he goned?

CLABE

[*Slowly*]

Yis Granny.— *But he'll be back ag'in!*

CURTAIN